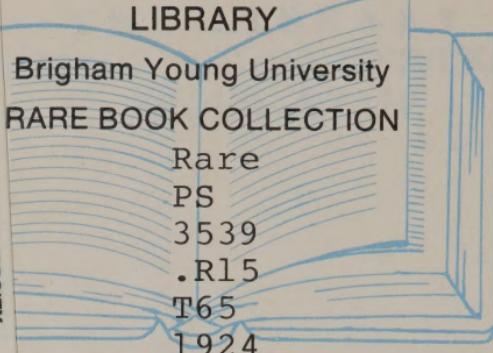


THE TOKEN

LOUIS TRACY



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THE TOKEN

THE TOKEN

BY

LOUIS TRACY

AUTHOR OF "THE TURNING POINT," "THE WINGS OF THE MORNING,"
"DIANA OF THE MOORLAND," "THE TERMS OF
SURRENDER," ETC., ETC.



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CHAPTER I

“THE KING’S HEAD”

So recently as a day in June, 1922, the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring (if acquainted with the noble barony of Copmanthorpe you pronounce the family surname as though it were spelt “Mannering”) found herself alone in her father’s Mayfair residence, and wondered idly during breakfast how best she could use many hours of sunshine freed by happy chance from any social engagement.

Being a bit of an artist, she had marked down at least three galleries of Modern Art for prolonged inspection, but it would be almost a sin to bury one’s self in stuffy rooms on such a glorious day as this promised to be. There were, of course, several dozens of people whom she might ring up on the ’phone, and the merest hint of loneliness, even of boredom, would bring invitations to fill a whole fortnight. But, for some reason, though she loved gaiety, and was really well liked

by her friends, the fashionable round made no appeal that morning.

The Honourable Peggy was not accustomed to moods of indecision. Still nibbling a piece of toast, she rose from the table, went to a window, and glued her nose to a pane of that pink-tinted glass found so rarely nowadays in London's Georgian mansions. She was young enough and pretty enough to risk this drastic treatment of her nose. The mere action bespoke a quality of girlish impulsiveness which had survived her twenty-first birthday.

She said to herself:

"It's rather a fag to have an off day and not know what to do with it. Let's see if the weather is really as fine as it looks."

The weather answered by revealing a Curzon-street shining in the sun and a sky unflecked by any wisp of cloud.

The morning-room door opened, and Peggy turned her head just in time to catch the eye of a maid who had peeped in and was making off again.

"Come in, Monica!" cried Miss Mainwaring. "You can clear the table. I'm going out somewhere, wherever that may be. Now, what would *you* do if you could just put on your hat and vanish till dusk?"

Monica smiled—rather wistfully, Peggy thought.

The girl was not a Cockney, so gave no pert answer, such as—“Not my luck!” or the more plaintive—“I’ve bin too busy even to think of it.” She merely said at once:

“If I had the chance, miss, I’d take the train to Sutton, borrow my sister’s bicycle, and go for a long ride over the Downs.”

“By yourself?”

“Yes, miss. I like it best that way. You can go where you please, and rest when you’re tired, and there’s always some place where you can get a cup of tea before making for home again.”

“Let me see. Your people live in Sutton, don’t they?”

“Yes, miss. On the Banstead Road.”

“Well, everything is spick and span here. Shall I ask Mr. Hobbs to give you the day off?”

Monica blushed with joy at the mere suggestion. So Peggy interviewed a dignified butler, and placated him with the announcement that meals, other than “something on a plate” late that evening, need not disturb the domestic staff further—in so far as she was concerned—until the following morning.

In a word, Monica, by her prompt devotion to the charms of the Surrey Downs, had not only gained unexpected freedom but also solved the problem which

perplexed her young mistress, since that title might reasonably be assumed by Lady Copmanthorpe's daughter during the week she was presiding over the household.

Within an hour, having written some letters, the Honourable Peggy had changed her clothing to a home-spun skirt, a brown silk blouse, strong brown shoes and stockings, and a nondescript hat meant for golf, tennis, the sea and the moors, and equally becoming in each of these somewhat varied conditions. She entered the Green Park near the new yet old and always beautiful hammered iron gates taken from Devonshire House, and passed a detachment of the Guards marching along the Mall from Chelsea barracks to St. James's Palace.

Although her countrified garb, on a June morning in London, amounted almost to a disguise, two officers saw her, and smiled in surprised recognition.

"Dear me!" she thought. "I had no idea men were so sharp-eyed. I didn't think a soul in town would know me in this rig. What a thing it is to have a face which is a fortune! And what will Bobby say when they tell him?"

Lord Robert Ferris, as colour-bearer, was compelled by the King's regulations, or some equally potent force, to march with "eyes front." Yet he was the one among

three who might have been expected to discover Peggy were she clothed in rags, because he was infatuated about her, and was even now raging at the ill luck which allotted him twenty-four hours of continuous duty on one of the few days Lady Copmanthorpe would be out of town during the season.

Peggy’s cheeks dimpled with glee as she pictured Lord Robert’s annoyance at not having shown, even by so much as a flicker of the eyelids, that he was aware of her. She was not conceited, but just happy and care-free, with the eichor of youth and good health dancing in her veins. At that moment a baby cooed at her from the depths of a perambulator, and was told forthwith that he was a darling.

Arrived at Victoria Station she looked around casually for Monica, who was not visible, for the very good reason that the girl had flown out of the house ten minutes after Mr. Hobbs proved complaisant. Miss Mainwaring took a first-class return to Sutton, and caught a train at eleven o’clock, having ascertained that an express from Portsmouth to London halted at Sutton at 5 p. m. Her simple programme was to hire a bicycle, and roam the Downs for five hours. She would then be sufficiently tired to enjoy a light meal at seven, read till ten, and, go early to bed, which would be quite

a change from the habits and times of society in June.

In Sutton a bicycle-dealer offered her a certain type of machine at ten shillings for the day, plus a deposit of one pound sterling. Peggy examined the tyres, tested the handle-bar, fork and pedals, and said pleasantly:

"Suppose I pay fifteen shillings and deposit two pounds—will you then give me something on which I may possibly not break my neck?"

There was no argument. After signing a book "P. Mainwaring," she left for Banstead on a quite reliable machine, the proprietor of the shop merely remarking to an assistant:

"S'elp me! Wimmen nowadays are that independent! An' it beats me where the young 'uns get the money. Didjer twig the roll of notes in 'er purse?"

The assistant had twigged, and said so curtly. In his secret soul, or what served as such, he was annoyed at two things—that the "boss" had not been many miles distant when this nice girl called, and that she should have been asked to accept a worn-out bicycle.

As it happened, the Honourable Peggy had absolutely no experience of unaccompanied travel on the

King's highway in the vicinity of London, so her knowledge of life as it is lived by the proletariat widened considerably during the first half hour. She discovered that a certain type of motorist gave her the glad eye in passing, that gawky youths deemed it funny to shout at her, and that a number of men on bicycles overtaking her were individually eager to share the road and guide her to her destination. Moreover, this being one of the main arteries leading to Brighton, there was far too much traffic for safety or comfort, so she halted when she saw the familiar uniform of an Automobile Association scout, and sought information as to a less popular route.

The man directed her to the Epsom Downs and the Old Roman Road to Dorking. Thenceforth the hours passed most agreeably. At one o'clock she bought apples and biscuits in a village shop, sheltering in the nearest thicket to munch them. She basked in the sun for a long time, and grew so interested in the furtive gambols of a colony of rabbits, with lordly pheasants stalking about as though their wings were meant for ornament rather than use, that she nearly lost count of time, and found herself on a hill overlooking Dorking at a quarter to four. Here a rose-bowered inn, announcing itself as “The King's Head,” thrust a tea garden to the verge of the road, so Peggy wheeled her

bicycle through a trellis, and who should be there but Monica, with a young man, seated at the first table on the right!

The parlour-maid blushed scarlet, evidently to the astonishment of her companion, but Peggy only laughed.

"What luck!" she cried. "Somehow, I thought I might run across you. You see, I followed your good example—to a certain extent, anyhow. I am dying for a cup of tea. May I join you?"

Monica plucked up courage, explained breathlessly that the young man, name of "Fred," was present by the merest accident, and kicked the said Fred under the table as a signal to order a fresh pot of tea and some cakes. He acted with such eagerness that Peggy had not the heart to say she meant paying for her own refreshments. Fred was bashful, but most polite. He had not the remotest notion as to who Monica's well-spoken if quietly-dressed friend might be, though, in his own phrase, he began to "smell a rat" when the one girl invariably addressed the other as "Miss." Then there was talk about the weather, and the bicycles, and the good fortune which brought them together in this pretty place, which harmless chatter goes to prove that the Honourable Peggy was not the least bit of a snob.

At last she glanced at her wrist-watch. It was nearly a quarter past four.

“Good gracious!” she cried, “I shall never reach Sutton by five, and my train leaves then.”

“There’s another fast train at six, miss,” said the parlour-maid, “but, if you’re in a hurry, you can go back by train from Dorking, an’ me and Fred can return the bike and collect the deposit. I’ll be at the house before ten.”

After a brief discussion as to times and distances, Peggy had just elected to catch the six o’clock train from Sutton when a somewhat peculiar incident drew her attention.

Two men, standing in the centre of the roadway in front of the inn, were so intent in low-toned conversation that a swift and remarkably silent motor-bicycle swept round a corner hidden by trees, and was on them before they were aware of its nearness. No actual danger threatened. The cyclist swerved skilfully, but the pair in the road must have been nervous subjects, as they sprang aside in alarm, and collided with each other. Presumably, in the light of subsequent events, one was either examining or handing over to his companion a half-crown at the very instant the motor-cycle seemed to be on top of them. Be that as it may, Peggy, who was so seated as to command

a clear view, saw the coin roll toward her, and, with the crass ingenuity often displayed by inanimate objects, thrust itself into a crack between two kerb-stones. There were many such stones, but only one open crevice, and the half-crown found that solitary refuge, burying itself so snugly that it could not be seen by anyone not aware of its exact hiding-place unless the searcher's eyes peered into the quarter-inch division from which the cement had vanished.

Peggy could not be sure, of course, that the coin had been in the possession of either of the men. It might conceivably have been lying unnoticed on the road, to be spun into activity by the speeding machine. But she distinctly heard the younger of the pair say with an oath that he had "dropped that b—— token"—a phrase not only forcibly peculiar in itself but made a hundred-fold more remarkable by the strange behaviour of his companion, who, after a frenzied glance at an apparently innocent road, decided that Fred, interested now, but whose head had turned a fraction of a second too late to notice what actually had happened, must have picked up the missing coin.

He leaped through the trellised arch with a nimbleness suggestive of a panther's spring, though he looked all of fifty-five years of age, or even more.

"Give me that half-crown," he said, in a reedy, high-

pitched voice. “It rolled this way, and you must have seen it. There is no one else.”

The words were offensive enough, but the rage in the speaker’s face was so demoniac that it branded Fred as a thief without any sort of extenuation. Peggy’s first impression was that he resembled an animal, her second that he was rather of the vulture tribe. His forehead sloped away from protuberant eyebrows nearly destitute of hair. His sallow cheeks were sunken, and a vindictive mouth was hardly veiled by a scanty moustache and tuft of beard on lower lip and chin. But his prominent eyes supplied an almost redeeming feature, though they were aflame with the fury now sparkling in their brown depths. His hands were literally talon-like, and his sparse frame was evidently compact of tense sinews. In fact, the suggestion of a human bird of prey was most convincing were it not for the eyes, which were those of a poet, or artist, certainly of a dreamer.

Fred, who had helped to shatter the Hindenburg line, was not a fit subject to be addressed in such hectic fashion, especially before his best girl and her pal!

“Wot ‘arf-crown?” he demanded wrathfully, rising to his feet, and kicking his chair out of the way, in case,

as the French say, he had to step back in order to jump farther.

The stranger was livid with anger, and, Peggy imagined, fear as well. His attitude was so outrageous that she resented it strongly, and was minded not to stop the imminent quarrel at once by pointing out the coin's shy nook. She was sure "Fred" could take care of himself. Very well. Let this rascal be punished!

"The half-crown which my friend dropped," came the answer. "You have it. I know you must have it. Hand it over, or I'll tear your liver out, you—"

Fred was quick on the trigger. The concluding word, probably a nasty one, was smothered by a queer cough, as Fred's left drove home into the speaker's chest, hurling him into the arms of his companion.

"No more o' that," said Fred quietly, "or the next one will smash that crooked conk of yours. . . . There's nothing to be afride of, Mona," he went on, because Monica screamed. "I can 'andle a biker's dozen like 'im, any d'y."

Then the affair took a very serious turn, yet, just as suddenly, died away to nothing, for the aggressor's right hand dropped to his coat pocket, but the second man grabbed his arm, muttering hoarsely:

“*Tiens, mon vieux!* Here comes a policeman. Be off, quick! I believe we can find that piece later.”

The two hurried away to the left, or Sutton-wards, leaving Fred and the two girls to gaze blankly after them.

“Well, if that doesn’t beat the band!” commented Fred. “Didjer ever—”

No, Monica had certainly never. But she did hope Miss Mainwaring was not alarmed.

Peggy had not been alarmed at any stage of the proceedings, though that significant action by Fred’s assailant gave her a thrill, the obvious inference being that he was about to produce a pistol. The men had disappeared when she stepped out into the roadway. A tall policeman was strolling up leisurely from the opposite direction. She stooped, prised out the half-crown with a hairpin, and said, with a laugh:

“Here is the cause of all the trouble! This policeman can arrange with the landlord to give it to that foolish old person when he returns, and also warn him not to behave so idiotically in future.”

While speaking she glanced at the coin. By one of those idle chances which seem to decide the great events of life it was lying in her hand with the head uppermost, and her alert eyes instantly detected something so strange, so bizarre, in a distinct defacement which

had been inflicted on his Majesty's portrait in low relief, that she was aware of a new sensation added to the many experienced during the space of a minute, or less. She felt a premonition of evil, of some influence so sinister and malevolent that both the raving of one nearly a lunatic in his complete absence of self-control and the sturdy readiness of Fred to settle a dispute by a straight blow were dwarfed at once into insignificance.

Some madman, using a steel punch and a hammer, had driven three dagger-shaped wedges into the King's head. There could be no manner of doubt as to the intent of the person who had thus maltreated a coin of the highest current value in Great Britain. The injuries depicted could hardly be the outcome of an accident. Each had a convincingly murderous semblance. The punch, or cold chisel—though, if it were the latter, it must have been ground to a peculiar shape—had been adjusted so as to convey the suggestion of a thoroughly effective thrust, and then a tremendous blow with a heavy mallet had driven the steel well into the softer metal. One wound pierced the forehead, a second the back of the head, and a third the base of the skull.

Peggy believed vaguely that the half-crown had been maltreated in this way quite recently. Hardly knowing

why, she turned it, and examined the date, 1915. So it had been minted during the Great War. So far as she could discern, there were no marks on that side, and the coin itself was not badly worn, not enough, indeed, to account for its seven years of life. Then she realised the singular fact that if she had not held it at first so as to discern those horrid-looking stabs she might never have noticed them at all, as she would hardly have scrutinised it again before handing it to the policeman, who, by the way, was now only a few yards distant.

She gazed at him, and promptly yielded to another slight shock, since she had never before set eyes on just such a representative of law and order. For one thing, he was a sergeant, a very young sergeant; for another, he might have been the captain of the Guards company who smiled at her that morning opposite Buckingham Palace, were it not that the one man wore sober blue and the other a magnificent blend of scarlet and gold.

And he was looking at her, too, not critically or obtrusively, but doubtless wondering why this pretty girl was staring at him with those wide-open eyes. The Honourable Peggy Mainwaring had, of course, met lots of policemen, sergeants, inspectors, superintendents even. She knew by sight many of those on duty in

Mayfair, while she could name a score, or more, in Derbyshire and Scotland. So she was not likely to be nervous in speaking to any police sergeant, no matter how young and good looking he might be.

"I want to have a word with you," she said, collectedly enough. "A strange thing happened here not two minutes ago, and I think you ought to know about it."

"Certainly," said the sergeant. "I am completely at your service."

She remembered afterwards that she was surprised again by his well-bred accent, which argued a public school education, while he stood easily, neither nibbling the chin-strap of his helmet nor thrusting his thumbs into his belt. These things did not concern her, however. With the concise clearness of one sure of her ground she told him exactly what had taken place since the motor-cyclist whizzed past, evidently interesting him by her description of "*mon vieux*," and still more gripping his attention by her Parisian French.

But he was frankly bewildered by sight of the marked coin. At first, as he confessed a little later, he failed to find in its dents the disturbing influence it had exercised on Miss Mainwaring. That was very wrong of him. Though he could not guess it, he was losing precious time just then, but his mind was actually focussed

on what seemed to be a story of possible assault and battery. His only excuse was that he really was a young sergeant, and his informant a remarkably pretty girl. For all that, his manner was an admirable blend of sympathy and officialdom.

“You say the younger man, he who spoke French, alluded to this as ‘the token,’ ” he repeated thoughtfully. “That is odd, distinctly odd. When read in the light of the other fellow’s excitement it raises a doubt in one’s mind as to their object in life. . . . Is this the man who hit the old boy who started the trouble?”

“Yes.”

Fred, a rather sheepish Fred, posted now as to the Honourable Peggy’s identity, came forward and gave brief testimony. So did Monica. All the time the sergeant was examining the half-crown, or nearly all the time, as he stole an occasional glance at Peggy, being thoroughly mystified when he had summed up her friends. But he was a quite wide-awake sergeant.

“Those two cannot have gone far,” he said. “I’d like to have a look at them. . . . May I borrow your bike?”—this to Fred, who consented readily, and he sped away.

Peggy, availing herself of a breathing space, re-

quested Monica and Fred not to be needlessly descriptive in regard to herself.

"We may never hear another word about this affair," she explained. "On the other hand, there is a chance, a slight one, that the police may want our evidence, and this sergeant will probably ask for our names and addresses, so I wish to keep titles and that sort of thing completely out of it. I'm sure you understand?"

Monica did, beyond doubt. Both Lady Copmanthorpe and Mr. Hobbs would regard the whole business with marked disfavour. Moreover, she could not help speculating as to Miss Mainwaring's reason for not having quelled the disturbance forthwith by disclosing the whereabouts of the half-crown. That was "funny" to say the least. Why, it nearly led the valiant Fred into a horrid fight! Monica, be it remembered, was not then aware of the problematic pistol. But Fred was. He had actually grabbed an iron-topped table to serve as a buckler while he charged, having learned in a hard school that it is the height of foolishness to stand still and allow the other fellow to shoot unhindered, or unhindenburghed, as he would put it in his lighter moments.

A sort of general compact was made before the police sergeant came back. The earth seemed to have swallowed the supposed lunatic and his friend, he said,

though it could be taken for granted they had skulked off among the trees. However, he would try a longer cast on foot. Now, as to descriptions——

Between them, the three supplied tolerably accurate pictures. Fred, who had vignetted many varieties of foreigners at unpleasantly close quarters, believed the older man was a Russian or a Pole, while Peggy testified to a sort of accent, a tone rather than a mispronunciation.

“Don’t you think a half-crown should be left here in an envelope?” she suggested producing a purse.

“I’ll do that,” said the sergeant quickly.

“You mean you will provide the money? All right. But won’t it be more cautious if my friend, Monica, talks to the landlord, and tells him the coin was found on the path?”

The police sergeant conveyed by a look that someone was highly intelligent, since he grasped the essential suppressions of fact in those two brief sentences.

“Capital!” he agreed, handing Monica a coin from which, as Peggy saw, the King’s minted portrait gleamed in placid perfection.

“And now, where can I find you all?” went on the sergeant. Miss Monica Jackson and Miss “Margaret” Mainwaring supplied the Curzon-street address, Mr. Frederick Blenkey one at Ewell.

"By the way," said the sergeant, pencil in hand, "how do you spell your name, Miss Mainwaring?"

"Oh, the swank way," she smiled, having foreseen this question. She watched, and observed that he wrote her surname correctly. It was time now to make for Sutton, and, realising that Fred and Monica were undecided, Peggy asked them to accompany her.

"It is possible," said the sergeant, "you may pass those fellows if they have taken to the road again. In that case, you might let the Sutton police know. I'll telephone them later."

"Why, mister?" inquired Fred. "It's not so very serious, is it?"

"One never can tell. I would like one of our plain clothes men to get on their track, and find out something about them. . . . Oh, you ought to have my name—Acting Sergeant Linton, Surrey County Constabulary, Dorking."

They rode off. Sergeant Linton looked after them.

"I suppose she's a governess or lady's maid," he mused. "Jolly nice girl, anyhow!"

And Peggy was thinking that the conditions of after-the-war life must have brought an entirely new class of men into the police force, though she could hardly discuss the point with her present companions. The three had a quite uneventful ride to Sutton, but it was other-

wise with Sergeant Linton. He was vouchsafed that which is a necessary element of success in nearly all human affairs, and in none more than the detection of crime—a slice of luck.

CHAPTER II

SHARP WORK

YET, if luck lent a hand, he merited it by doing the right thing. It would have been quite wrong to go hunting the outskirts of woods when so large an area of cover was spread for men who had revealed already their desire to slink unseen. His best chance of meeting the strange pair again that day was to lurk around the inn in the hope that they might return and renew their search for the missing coin, as, indeed, the younger man had suggested.

Of course, Linton himself had actually set eyes on them, but at a distance, and before he had any knowledge that closer attention to their clothing and semblance would yield valuable assets. Unfortunately, they, too, had seen him, so his mere presence in uniform might prove disastrous. He solved this problem by hastening to a wayside garage, and borrowing a mechanic's jacket and overall of blue dungaree, with some brown paper and string. Retiring to a part of the wood whence he could watch the road in front of the "King's Head," he removed his tunic, helmet, collar and tie, turned up his trousers, and donned the less

becoming garments, which were so smeared with oil and black grease that his face and hands were soon of a professional tint, if tint be the word to express a grimed skin. The discarded articles he made into a parcel.

He did not forget to extract pipe and tobacco from a pocket of his tunic. He had no cap, but ruffled his hair, and buttoned the coat collar to conceal a far too clean shirt. Satisfied that this disguise would serve its purpose, he strolled into the inn's tea garden, and ordered a pint of beer, seating himself much nearer the building than the spot occupied by Miss Mainwaring and her friends. The Honourable Peggy alone figured in his thoughts. He dismissed her companions as stage supernumeraries; indeed, other considerations apart, she was the one witness of any real value, with Fred a fair second. Nor did he fail to note the curious coincidence of the name of the inn and the damaged surface of the half-crown. There was nothing in this, of course. It simply added a quaint accessory to a slight but rather unusual incident.

The maid whom he had asked for the beer sent the landlord instead.

"Sorry, my man," said the latter. "I can't serve you here. This garden is reserved for visitors and tourists." In effect, dirty dungarees looked very much

out of place, and might offend the eyes and nostrils of the noble patrons of the establishment.

Sergeant Linton did not argue; he merely pleaded.

"It's long after tea time," he said, "and people will hardly dine outside. I'm hot and tired. Please break your rule for once."

He spoke so pleasantly, and hinted so adroitly that motoring aristocrats "dined" each evening at the "King's Head," that the landlord softened.

"All right," he said. "But, look here, my lad. If any ladies turn up, hop it. The bar's round the corner."

The lad, vastly obliged, promised to hop it instantly, not only to save the face of a notable hotel but also because, as he put it, he couldn't expect to make much of a hit with the girls in his present garb.

Thenceforth, for a long thirty minutes, he smoked and sipped the beer. He was almost reduced to consuming a second pint of a rather thin brew when a man walked up briskly, and, if any doubt as to his identity with "mon vieux" could have existed, removed it by conducting a careful search of the road and pathway in front of the tea-garden's entrance.

After a methodical survey of every possible and impossible chink and cranny which could conceal so large a coin as a half-crown—he did not miss the crack where

it had actually reposed for so brief a time—he entered the garden, evidently to make inquiries. At that moment the mechanic was lighting his pipe, and burnt his fingers, stating his views on the accident with the fluency and freedom of language acquired by the British Army in Flanders during many campaigns.

The newcomer gave him no heed, but passed on. The neighbourhood was singularly quiet at that hour, about half past five o'clock; the beer-drinker could hear every word of an interesting conversation.

"Did anyone, by chance, say they had found a half-crown on the roadway outside?" inquired the reedy, high-pitched voice so accurately described by Miss Mainwaring.

The landlord answered.

"About what time, mister?" said he.

"Let me see. It would be about twenty minutes after four."

"Right y're. You're lucky. A young lady picked up something—she didn't say it was a half-crown—and left it in a envelope. If it's half a crown, why, then, it's yours."

Evidently there followed business of fetching an envelope from some interior room, opening the same, and the landlord's congratulations on proof of claim.

The fortunate owner listened in silence. Linton, if he dared, would have gone in then, and snatched another look at the man's face, but he deemed it wiser to sit still.

"Ah!" said the voice at last, and now it held a note of harshness, "an honest young lady, indeed! I would like to thank her. Is she here?"

"No, but she gave me her name. She's a Miss Monica Jackson, and she lives at Lady Copmanthorpe's house in Curzon-street—one of the maids, I suppose, out for a spin with her regular."

"Her regular?"

"Her young man."

"Ah, good! I remember him. Will you tell me the name and address again, please?"

The third but unobtrusive party to this interview, like most eavesdroppers, had heard more than he expected or liked. What had possessed the fool of a girl to advertise herself in that manner? Probably some feeling of pique at not being altogether in the lime-light earlier. Or, it might be, some vague sense of self-importance at being employed in a house of the mighty, for Lord Copmanthorpe, now stricken with lumbago in Scotland—hence his wife's hurried departure from London—was a member of the Government.

Linton, of course, was not yet aware either of his lordship's indisposition or of his family name.

"Thank you!" said "mon vieux," and came out. The mechanic was already shambling toward the bar, but he knew that the other must now have a weighing eye for all the world if the disappearance of a particular half-crown meant so much, so he did not attempt to turn, nor even stoop to tie a shoelace which he had undone purposely.

Without hesitation, he made his way from the bar through a passage leading to the main part of the inn.

"Hello!" cried a surprised landlord, meeting him.

"Sorry," said Linton, "but I think that old boy wants a chauffeur. I don't know him, but a pal described him. He lives near here, doesn't he?"

"Not him. Never saw him afore, and I never want to see him again. I've just handed him a half-crown he'd lost, an' he didn't so much as ask me to have a beer."

"Wasn't he pleased?"

"Pleased! He looked at it as if it had changed into a penny."

"Well, so long! He's not likely to be of much use to me if he's as stingy as all that."

The mechanic headed for the main entrance, and

the landlord was minded to recall him, but, as he seemed a nice, civil-spoken young fellow, let him go.

Linton hid behind the festoons of a Dorothy Perkins rose just in time to see his quarry halt and look back before reaching a bend in the road. Then he hurried from the garden into the wood, dived among the trees, some fifty yards at a right angle, ran a good three hundred yards parallel with the road, and risking ultimate failure, turned toward the road again. As it happened, his calculations were sound. He was well screened by the undergrowth when “*mon vieux*” and another man walked past. He took stock of the newcomer in profile, and summed him up as also a foreigner. They were talking earnestly, but it was impossible to learn more than that they spoke in French.

And now began the most difficult bit of scouting Linton had ever done, and he was no novice in the art, whether in peace or war. He had to keep well under cover, because these human foxes might double back on their trail. Every fifty yards or so he sighted them, and, after hard going for a mile—the wood being a wilderness of unthinned timber and uncut briars—he had the good fortune, during one of these peeps, to see them turn into a path which must intersect his own track.

If moving with the stealth of a skilled hunter before,

he now had to be wary as a tiger stalking its prey. It would be foolish to try and head them again, since one could not hope to strike a straight diagonal line through this tangle of greenery at a season when every leaf was out. So he followed the road, judged his pace, and took as boldly to the footpath, which began to descend. He seemed to remember that the ordnance map showed this wood as ending a long way from the valley. Hence, he slackened the pursuit when the sky became more visible. He was rewarded by seeing the pair who used such a strange "token," and were so perturbed by its loss, already half way across some meadow land, and making for a secluded house of some pretensions. Beyond its front garden and lawn, which were screened by trees and shrubs, a carriage-way led to the highway far beneath. This, he knew, was the main road from Dorking to Leatherhead.

They entered the house. He sat down, and lighted his pipe.

Five minutes later a Ford car sped along the drive, and dashed off London-wards.

"A Ford!" said Linton to himself. "How many Fords are snorting into town at this hour! Even if I had a telephone at my elbow I don't know the number of the insect. At any rate, so far so good. I've done something worth while, I think."

Then, not regarding himself as by any means a Heaven-sent genius of a detective, nor, indeed, as gifted in the least degree with the lightning powers of deduction which are the recognised attributes of every famous sleuth—in fiction—he set to work straightway to review the actual facts within his ken. He made a start by producing the battered half-crown, and studying it attentively.

The punch which had been used must almost have been contrived for its specific purpose, since the rim of the coin was not bitten into, and the effect of a thrust by spear head or dagger was secured by a pointed wedge exactly half an inch in length. The positions of the cuts, too, seemed to be not quite accidental, and it occurred to him that they might resemble the Roman numeral “IV.”, which is the symbol for “4” except on the faces of clocks and watches. The notion was a far-fetched one, of course, but what ordinary standard of thought could apply to any lunatic who defaced the King’s currency in such malicious fashion?

“By Jove!” he thought, “that in itself is an offence against the law. I must look up the section. If nothing better offers it might be an excuse for an arrest.”

That point need not have troubled him. Had he been armed with a service rifle, and shot those two men dead as they passed him in the road, he would have

served the community so well that Parliament should have decreed him a pension, whereas, in literal fact, he would possibly have been hanged for committing a cold-blooded murder.

A search through his pockets brought to light another half-crown dated 1915, and comparison showed that the rim of the damaged coin was noticeably broader than that of the presumably typical one in his own possession. The whole superficial area was bigger, too. These things were noteworthy, though he was convinced that the "token" was quite genuine in origin and metal. However, the seeming variations between the two moulds supplied a problem for some expert at the Mint; it would be solved readily there.

That word "token" was suggestive. The younger man said he had dropped it. Supposing those dents were not only made by a fanatic but did really represent a numeral, was the younger man No. 4, and "mon vieux" No. 1, 2, or 3? If so, for what purpose were they in league? Was it altogether fantastic to believe that in the disturbed England of today, with a distracted Ireland on one side and a volcanic Europe on the other, there might actually exist a number of misguided men banded in some wretched organisation which sought the life of the King as the admitted head of our social order?

Linton was not afraid to let his imagination run

riot. A wise old superintendent had said to him recently:

"Never check your thoughts, but, if in doubt, consult the Police Manual before you act. Reasonable doubt is a sort of first cousin to decision."

It was now six o'clock, and he ought to be in Dorking by seven, at the latest, if the routine of duty were to be observed. He was about to rise when a woman emerged from the cottage and took the Dorking road. Though tempted, he saw it would be folly to try a long slant downhill through the cultivated land, and overtake her. If this well-screened dwelling held its own mysteries, who could tell that a watcher was not on guard in an attic? In that case what a scurry of suspicious alarm would arise from the sight of a man emerging from the wood and hurrying across country! Monica Jackson, parlour-maid in the Home Secretary's London residence, had blundered badly in identifying herself so thoroughly when the orthodox half-crown had been substituted for its somewhat ominous fellow, though, to be sure, accident or the whim of the moment might have led to the change. The presence of a possible spy, however, would convert uneasiness into certainty.

So he tried to visualise this woman's height, gait and garments at a distance of six hundred yards, succeed-

ing so well that, after wiping his face, resuming his uniform, returning the dungaree suit, and reaching Dorking, he met and recognised the same woman crossing the river on her way back. They were alone on the bridge at the moment, but she did not look at him, seeming to be absorbed in the scenery to such an extent that her face was averted.

She wore a coat and skirt of brown cloth, and a nondescript felt hat. Her boots were of the light grey kid affected by Frenchwomen, though, if she were French, she had none of the elegance of a Parisienne in either costume or carriage. Her features in profile were well shaped, but her ungloved hands were large and coarse. From a wicker basket obtruded the feet of two fowls. Paper bags held the remainder of the contents.

Leaving nothing to guesswork, he hastened to a point on the opposite hill whence he could watch the house. In due course, the shopper entered its driveway. So he felt that, at any rate, he had now a nodding acquaintance with some of the occupants of the place. A few minutes later he reported the whole of the circumstances to a senior officer, who, like himself, began by treating the affair as unimportant, but ended by taking it seriously.

“Tell you what,” said the Superintendent, a Mr.

MacDermott, "let's run in and consult old Jenkins, the chemist. He has a flashlight photographic apparatus, and is a rare one for holding his tongue. He will rush out a print, and one of our men who is going up to town by the 8:45 tonight will take it straight to Scotland Yard. They may know something. At any rate, it will do no harm."

Chemist Jenkins was interested, and had two prints ready when Linton arrived after a much-needed meal. Moreover, Mr. Jenkins had weighed the suspect coin against another of the 1915 date, and found it half a grain lighter.

"Compare your half-crown with a print," he said, "and see if any special feature suggests itself."

Probably for purposes of more effective lighting, he had tilted the coin so that the normal perpendicular lay back at an angle of 45° , and Linton was astonished by the difference. The silver disc appeared on a black ground, and, if the original were sinister in aspect, the print was almost affrighting. Just as an ordinary photograph, by chance combinations of light and shade, may exaggerate or soften certain marked characteristics of the human face to an extent that almost destroys any real likeness, so did this reproduction accentuate the evil intent of the person who caused those strange marks.

"Great Scott!" cried Linton. "The thing looks worse than ever."

"Yes. My view is that the sooner you gentlemen lay by the heels whoever is responsible for this maltreatment of his Majesty's minted portrait the better it will be. Of course, I ask no questions, but I shall be glad to hear of developments, and will assist you in any way. Ugly as that damaged coin appears, there is an amusing side to the inquiry. It withstood the nitric acid test perfectly, whereas a 1921 half-crown turned green at once. Funny sort of alloy they must be using on Tower Hill these days!"

The station clerk was a competent typist, so Linton dictated a fairly complete statement, omitting no item of importance in the record of events since the hour when some unknown cyclist raised more dust than he knew of in front of the "King's Head" tea garden.

"Queer thing!" said the Superintendent, after glancing through the report. "One wouldn't attach much weight to this if the photograph were not available. I'm not a nervous subject, but, somehow, that picture gives me the creeps."

Sergeant Linton smiled.

"Government departments are always annoyed, sir," he said, "if any effort is made to polish up a memo-

random. I remember a general objecting to the phrase 'flashes of lurid light' in a description of a night strafe."

"I wasn't criticising your style. What struck me is the absolute triviality of each incident in itself, yet the ultimate conviction one has of something dangerous, even deadly, when the whole array of facts is looked at. . . . I wish that stupid girl had kept quiet. The other one must be rather intelligent."

"She was more than that, sir. I am more and more impressed by the recollection that she sensed in a few seconds what I took many precious minutes to see."

"Some women are intuitive beyond belief. But you lost no time. Why, you've pieced this jig-saw puzzle together as well as the best man in the Yard could have done it. Mind you collect your half-crown, and the price of that pint of beer! The county pays."

Linton was free now for the night. Indeed, he should have gone off duty at seven. He went to his quarters, and read some law until ten o'clock. Then he returned to the office, meaning to sit there and smoke for an hour. The messenger would now be reaching Scotland Yard, and, in the improbable event of a telephonic inquiry, he wanted to be on the spot.

And, behold! A call came through almost at once.

"The Yard on the 'phone," announced the station sergeant. "You'd better take it."

As Linton put his ear to the receiver a queer, cracked voice, such as a music-hall comedian cultivates, inquired:

"That Superintendent MacDermott?"

"No. Acting-Sergeant Linton."

"Ah, the very man. How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"A bit late in making a start, but you seem to have struck oil this time. Your story—"

"May I inquire who is speaking?"

"Detective-Inspector Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department, otherwise known as 'the French cop,' 'Funny face,' and 'the Little 'Un.' Now, don't interrupt again, Acting-Sergeant Linton. Your story seems to fit in with a crazy sort of yarn spun by a Regent-street vendor of dope who was run in at Vine-street two nights ago. He snivelled, and said he was really doin' the lawr a good turn, s'elp him if he wasn't. Go now and find Mr. MacDermott, and ask him to oblige us by having that house watched night and day until he hears further."

"Should we begin tonight?"

"Why not?"

"I was merely putting a suggestion in an interrogative form."

"Were you, indeed? What school did you go to?"

"Marlborough."

"Phi-ew! And you only a uniformed bobby at twenty-eight?"

"That is but a small part of my sad history."

"I think I shall like you. I'll try and run over to Dorking tomorrow afternoon. Now I'll put a suggestion in an affirmative form. Tell your Superintendent that Mr. Furneaux will be glad if you are given charge of this job. But don't get a swollen head on that account. I have a special hatred of uniformed men who believe they can teach the Yard a thing or two. . . . Oh, before you go—Is this Miss Mainwaring good looking?"

"Exceedingly so."

"Don't use such silly words. No women can be excessively good looking, though too many are infernally plain. She's a thoroughly nice girl, I take it?"

"Yes. I think I prefer that description."

"You married?"

"No."

"I thought not. Well, arrange matters with Mr.

MacDermott. See you tomorrow, D.V., though what D may V for Scotland Yard twelve hours in advance, a wretched worm like me can never predict."

Acting-Sergeant Linton had not been a member of the Surrey County Constabulary so long as Mr. Furneaux seemed to imagine; hence, being absorbed in the humdrum duties of a country policeman, he had not heard of the Scotland Yard detective least known to the general public, yet, perhaps, the most famous man now employed by the C.I.D. But, whoever Mr. Furneaux might be, he was unquestionably an oddity. His voice was queer, his utterances ever more queer; the way in which he jumped from subject to subject queerest of all.

What on earth did he mean by his questions about Miss Mainwaring? He thought so, he said, after being assured as to her physical charms. What did it concern him whether or not an Acting-Sergeant at Dorking were married? Linton, while a colleague was summoning Mr. MacDermott by telephone, ran through the wording of his report to discover the clue which set Mr. "Funny face's" wits working. He had written: "Miss Mainwaring spoke so convincingly that, though minded to treat the affair as unimportant, I decided to investigate it thoroughly." And again: "Miss Mainwaring

should be a dependable witness. She is cool, level-headed and sincere."

Was that it? Not a strong foundation for Mr. Furneaux's theorising. Confound the fellow, was he hinting that the sight of a pretty face could warp one's judgment? But here came Mr. MacDermott, who sent a reserve constable post haste to recall a man on night duty, and placed both at Sergeant Linton's disposal.

"The Yard evidently looks for developments," he commented. "But they're close, ridiculously close. They have, or seem to have, a belief that the average policeman is a bungler. Well, it is true, painfully true, that a long course of detecting fowl-stealers and petty shop-lifters is not the best of training for dealing with the higher criminology, but we fellows ought to be given a chance of proving our mettle when a real crime occurs. I can assure you of one thing, Linton. If this affair shows signs of being something big it won't be my fault if the Yard steps in and grabs all the credit when we have done all the dirty work."

"Do you know Mr. Furneaux, sir?"

"Oh, yes. He is undoubtedly a genius. If you're lucky you will see him at work, and it will be an education. Not that I personally approve of his methods. He has a knack of projecting his own wits

into a criminal's mind, and guessing what the next move will be. Psychology, I think he calls it. One of these days a judge will catch him at his tricks, and there will be a rare dust up in the Old Bailey. I'm sure Furneaux never acts within the law. He is a law unto himself. But he is fortunate in the fact that his immediate chief, Mr. Winter, follows what one may call the orthodox methods. Winter is a big fellow, massive, blond, very affable. Furneaux might be a jockey or a diminutive actor, but he certainly is a terror to crooks, and between the pair of them, a front-rank scoundrel has as much chance of escaping as—”

The telephone rang again. At that moment the two constables entered.

“Scotland Yard on the 'phone, sir,” said the station sergeant. Mr. MacDermott motioned to Linton to listen in on a second receiver.

“That you, Linton?” came Furneaux's voice, sharply now, with a staccato clipping of syllables that was almost a yelp. The change was unmistakable, just as the whimpering of a hound in the covert announces certainty when before there was only suspicion.

“He is here, at the 'phone, but MacDermott speaking,” was the reply.

“Twenty minutes ago, at 10.5 or thereabouts, the girl Monica Jackson (I am assuming this) was about

to enter Lord Copmanthorpe's house when she was accosted by a man who had evidently been waiting for her, while a taxi drew up slowly to the kerb. She made some reply, and was hustled, screaming, into the cab. One of our men, Foster, who had been sent from the nearest police station to make inquiries as soon as Sergeant Linton's report was read here, arrived at that moment, but, when he tried to interfere, was stabbed so seriously that he may not recover. He was able, however, to tell Lord Copmanthorpe's butler what had happened. The butler came out when he heard the screams. The cab, of course, had gone, girl and all. Now I advise that the Box Hill house be not raided tonight, but very closely watched. Have a hidden motor-cyclist available if any car leaves there, and he should arrest the occupants when an opportunity offers as they pass through some town. Naturally, all your men should be well armed. Let them shoot to kill if resisted in the execution of their duty. It is quite clear that this gang won't have any scruples in that respect. . . . Excuse me, Superintendent, but has Linton got all this?"

"Every word."

"Splendid. We know we can depend on you, Mr. MacDermott. Ring, if there's any new news. I'll do the same."

The Superintendent hung up the 'phone.

"We've got to make a night of it," he said briskly, turning away to give instructions to the station sergeant as to providing the additional help now needed.

The telephone bell jangled again, and Linton picked up the receiver.

"Oh, thank goodness!" cried an agitated voice which he recognised at once. "Is that you, Mr. Linton?"

"Yes, Miss Mainwaring," he said.

"Have you heard the dreadful thing that happened here?"

"You mean about Miss Jackson and Detective Foster?"

"So you *do* know. I have been trying for fifteen minutes to get through, but the wretched telephone service—"

"Don't blame the Exchange. Scotland Yard was on the wire."

"Is *that* the reason? Well, of course, I couldn't tell. But what has become of poor Monica?"

"I should imagine—"

He caught Mr. MacDermott's eye, the Superintendent having grabbed the other receiver.

—"that she is safe enough," he went on. "But guessing is absolutely useless. Give me your 'phone number. If we have anything important to communicate,

you will hear of it. Will you excuse me now? I have not a second to spare."

"Good-bye! But—I have faith in you—Mr. Linton. Please, please, rescue our Monica, though, indeed, I grieve, too, for that brave detective! I saw him. Whoever drove that knife into his breast meant murder!"

CHAPTER III

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

"I ALWAYS try to be fair," growled the Superintendent, as he and Linton walked down the main street to the Leatherhead road. A motor-cyclist had preceded them, and four constables were to follow in pairs, so that observant eyes might not notice the passing in one direction of so many members of the local police force at an unusually late hour. "I try to be fair to the Yard," he repeated, "and this time I must admit that the C.I.D. has stolen a march on us."

Linton was surprised, and said so.

"Oh, they've bested us right enough," said Mac-Dermott sadly. "We were a good many hours ahead of them in this affair, yet they sent a man to Lord Copmanthorpe's house by 'phone the instant they read your report. That was at ten o'clock, or thereabouts, and here are we just setting a watch on these scoundrels' house at eleven, though it is our own special job."

"But, sir," protested Linton, "they evidently pos-

sessed information not known to us. They were aware of a puzzle which they could not solve until we supplied the key, or, if not quite that, a clue regarded as so important that they took prompt action."

"Um—yes—that's just an excuse. But I've looked through so many brick walls in my time that I ought to have seen farther into this one. The big affairs of life nearly always start in a trivial way. I suppose you are too young to have heard of the Muswell Hill murder? . . . Well, the capture of two desperate criminals depended on the fact that a small boy was found playing in the street with a toy lantern."

"Still, in that instance, somebody was killed first," said Linton.

"How can we guess what manner of killing these people may have planned? Mind you, I'm not blaming you. You did everything possible. I ought to have nosed something at once out of your story. I suppose I'm growing old. And the front rank crimes so seldom come into our beat. You'll not understand what I mean till you're fifty. . . . Brought your pipe? Light up. We may not be able to smoke again till our relief comes at four."

"Do you mean to remain all night, sir?"

"Of course. The more I think of this business the bigger it seems. We're living in crazy times. The motor-car has widened the criminal area. Wireless, too, has increased our difficulties. Time was when an international gang, such as this appears to be, wouldn't dream of operating outside London, or, at best, three or four of the larger provincial cities. Now they can establish relays anywhere. The one factor favouring us fellows in the shires is that every resident in any particular locality is fairly well known, though the advantage in crime detection becomes weaker the nearer we are to London, since so many people who live here have their business and friends in town. However, Sergeant Hicks should bring us something definite about the occupants of this cottage within the hour."

"I am curious to know where he will begin inquiring," said the younger man.

"At the rate-collector's and the post-office. The rate-collector will probably indicate a house agent, while the postman who serves that district will know whether or not letters and parcels go there, and to whom they are addressed."

"I'm afraid I would not have thought of the rate-collector," laughed Linton.

"Wait till you're married, and run a place of your own. You'll think of him then—far too often."

Both men fell silent as they approached the entrance to the suspected house. There was no moon, but the sky was clear, and the dim light of a mid-summer night was aided by the stars. The building itself lay fully a hundred yards from the road, and was so shrouded by trees and shrubs that even if all its windows were illuminated no hint of such interior brilliance could be gained from the lower level of the highway. At any rate, house and foliage now showed only as a deeper smear of blackness on the dark hillside.

The carriage-way was not so heavily screened; its privet hedges were about three feet high; a couple of chestnuts towered over white gate-posts.

They had just noticed that the gate was closed, a fact which probably rendered superfluous a supply of strong wire which one of the constables was bringing, when they were halted by a slight "S-s-s-t!" from a hedge on the right. The motor-cyclist crept forward, just sufficiently to reveal himself.

"Would you mind coming here, sir?" he said, being evidently anxious that the others should not remain silhouetted against the white surface of the road.

The Superintendent was in uniform. Linton, having changed to a tweed suit earlier in the evening, had not delayed matters by going back to his lodgings.

"Just as I was coming along the road, sir," the policeman whispered to MacDermott, "a car turned in through that gate, which was open then. It was a good thirty yards away, and nipped in so quickly that I couldn't make out how many people were in it—"

"A taxi?" broke in the Superintendent.

"No, sir. A Ford roadster, I think."

"All right. Go on. But, don't whisper. Speak in a low tone. And pause to listen after each sentence."

"Well, sir, I cracked on. I saw by their tail light that they hadn't stopped, so I pulled up quietly, came back, wheeling the machine, and hid it here. Then I waited. Good job I did, too. A man came down the Avenue on foot, stood outside the gate for a minute or two, looked up and down the road, and then closed the gate. I think I heard a door bang just before you arrived."

"Good work! When the other men join us we are going inside. You will mount guard at the gate, and let no one come out. Use your lamp, challenge, and

on the least suspicious sign, don't be afraid to shoot. But keep your wits about you. Don't kill anybody just because they are startled. Say who you are, and, if things seem right, get the person or persons to come forward and explain their presence, on the ground that you saw some suspicious characters enter here, and were watching for their re-appearance. That will be quite true, you know, as six of us will be up there somewhere. If you need help, whistle. If we whistle, stand fast. I depend on you holding the gate, and keeping it closed: you might bring your bike, and jam the handle-bar into it. Shelter behind a post, so that you will be fairly well covered if shot at. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, here are the others—talking, of course, and marching all in a row. Skip along the grass and tell them to either shut up or sing loudly."

Four somewhat abashed constables loomed into sight, led by their guide.

"I wonder you didn't rehearse the 'Policemen's Chorus' from 'The Pirates of Penzance?'" muttered MacDermott. "Now you, and you," touching two of them, "go back to the next hedge leading up the hill. Follow it until well beyond that house there—the one which this white gate leads to. Then turn to your left

until you find a footpath, or cart road—which is it, Sergeant Linton?”

“Both, sir.”

“Well, this path leads to the back part of the house. Get near the premises, whether garden or yard, and post yourselves so that you can hear and collar anyone leaving the place on that side. Challenge, and show your lamps, of course, but have your automatics ready, too, though you must not shoot unless convinced that the others mean mischief. If anything serious happens, whistle once. If you hear a whistle, make for the back door, demand admission, and, if it is refused, try and break in. On a second whistle, a long one, retreat, disposing yourselves in such a way that you can see and challenge anyone emerging, not only by the path but to left or right. Challenge loudly. Nothing may occur, and you will not be relieved until four o’clock, though I may send at dawn telling you to retire up the hill. Keep under cover, wherever you are. Of course, you’ll talk, but smoking is not to be thought of. Now, use your wits. This job is either a complete fizzle or something you will remember for the rest of your lives. I give you ten minutes to be on that path.”

Two figures stole away.

"Does that gate creak?" the Superintendent inquired.

"No, sir. Anyhow, it didn't a while since," said the cyclist.

"Hold it open for us. We want to keep all eyes front."

Without incident, MacDermott and his aides found themselves standing behind a clump of laurels bordering a circular drive, with a flower bed in the centre. A light shone faintly through the vasistas over the front door, but the rest of the house was in darkness, though, as it transpired, the ground-floor windows were shuttered within, a fact soon revealed by a momentary increase of light in the hall when an inner door was opened, apparently that leading to a front room on the right of the watchers.

"Luckily you are in plain clothes, Linton," said the chief, after ascertaining that the allotted ten minutes had expired. "Go quietly to the door or windows, and listen. If surprised by anybody, say you want to find out the nearest way to Box Hill, as you were told of a short cut by a path. But for Heaven's sake, don't take it, or those two warriors will give the game away, even if they don't shoot you. Of course, you may accomplish nothing. On the other hand, you may bolt our foxes."

Still mindful of the fact that watchful eyes might be peering from an upper window, Linton did not advance furtively, but took to the carriage drive, though he strolled forward so quietly that his feet did not crunch on the gravel. A glance at the front door showed that it had neither knocker nor letter-box, but the white disc of an electric bell gleamed at him. Halting there, he looked up at the windows on the first floor. Apparently, he had not been seen. Then he went to the windows of the room which seemed to be occupied.

They were so closely shuttered within that not a chink of light was visible, and he was sure that voices in ordinary conversation could not be heard through that solid screen. He waited some minutes before he thought he could distinguish the scraping of a chair on a parquet floor. Then someone shouted:

"Milles diables! Wake up, girl! Here, drink this!"

Though muffled, the words reached him clearly. They reminded him so strongly of an impatient French anæsthetist trying to revive a patient struggling back to consciousness, that he turned and waved an arm to the watchers among the laurels. The three joined him, and he told Superintendent MacDermott what had

happened, but, although certain vague sounds of speech were audible, it was impossible to catch their drift.

Suddenly, a woman screamed.

"Ah, no, for God's sake! Not that! Not that!
Take it away!"

The concluding words rose to an eldritch screech, and a man bellowed, also in a sort of falsetto:

"You will speak, then?"

"Yes, yes. Take it away!" shrilled the woman.

"Have your pistols ready, and watch the upper part of the house!" cried MacDermott to the two constables, Blowing a shrill peal on a whistle, he sprang to the door, rang the electric bell, which jarred quite closely—in the entrance hall, it would appear. He hammered loudly, too, with the butt of an automatic, and growled over his shoulder to Linton:

"Confound it! This is a steel door."

He had whistled, of course, intentionally, not only as a warning to the men stationed at the back but also to create alarm, if not terror, in the minds of those behind the shuttered windows. The clamour of the bell and the thundering on the door might be trusted to achieve the same purpose, and, indeed, a voice soon came from the hall.

"Who is there?" it demanded. "What is the matter?"

"Open—in the King's name!" said the Superintendent.

"Who are you?"

"The police."

"Go away! You have no business here!"

"That is 'mon vieux,'" muttered Linton in MacDermott's ear.

"If you don't open the door it will be broken in," went on the Superintendent.

"Try it!"

The unseen speaker seemed to pick up the gauge of battle with a confidence that was surprising in the circumstances, because, no matter what the outcome in legal redress for unlawful entry into an inhabited building, few people in the England of today are prepared to resist the officers of the law in the execution of that which they deem to be their duty.

"I warn you we are here in force, and well armed!" vociferated MacDermott.

He and the others thought they caught a mocking laugh, and the hall light was extinguished. The Superintendent was a strong man, and he knew how to apply his weight, but a single attempt at a panel with his shoulder told him that crowbars and a battering-

ram would be needed before a door of solid steel yielded.

"Go for the centre window with a jemmy, Adamson," he said to one of the constables. "If they fire at you, try and spring clear. Then we'll all scatter to the shrubbery, and I'll send for reinforcements. We can keep them boxed up till daylight, at any rate."

From the rear of the house came a series of heavy thuds, and the sounds suggested that the back door also was constructed of steel.

"We'll let those boys carry on," he said coolly to Linton. "If we get in at all it will be through a window, though this den of thieves is a fort, not a house."

Adamson tore the lower sash out of the window with a few vigorous leverings by a jemmy, a veritable house-breaking implement taken from a burglar captured some years earlier in Dorking itself. Then he attacked the shutters, which were constructed of thinner material than the door, and they began to give way. When a ragged opening of a few inches was made, Linton inserted an electric torch, and peered inside. He saw a table laid for a meal, with wine bottles and glasses, some of which had been used, but the eatables were untouched. The chairs were in disorder. On the table stood a small black box, with raised lid. On a couch

beyond the table he thought he could discern a corner of a shoulder and the rounded hip of a woman. She was dressed in a blue serge costume, and Monica Jackson had worn blue serge that afternoon. Out of the tail of his eye, so to speak, he fancied he saw something scuttling under an armchair near the fireplace, as though it wanted to hide, but he could not be certain, since the periphery of the rays of an electric torch is a small one, and he had to sweep the whole room with its beams as rapidly as possible. The door of the room was wide open, being so placed that it excluded any view of the passage.

The noise of the assault on the back door now resounded through the house, and was so deafening, while apparently so ineffectual, that MacDermott, peering eagerly over Linton's shoulder, stepped back a pace or two, and blew a long blast on the whistle, whereon the greater clamour ceased.

"Those fellows are doing no good," he said, "and may be missing the actual retreat while trying to break a hole through steel with a clothes prop of a paling."

Adamson was making excellent progress. He was re-adjusting the jemmy to dislodge a hinge when Linton called to the figure on the couch.

"Is that you, Monica Jackson?" he said.

There was no answer. The person lying there was either dead or unconscious.

Adamson's next effort forced out of position a whole section of the shutter, and Linton instantly thrust a leg over the window-sill.

"Don't hurry," came MacDermott's calm voice. "Wait on this side of the table until Adamson and I are in the room."

Perhaps Linton did not obey the order quite literally, but he did stand still and listen, with every faculty tense, the moment he gained the interior. He could hear nothing. A thin mist, bluish white in the light of the lamp, seemed to be sweeping in through the doorway along the floor, as though a wisp of cigarette smoke were floating on an air current.

With the rapidity of judgment born of many a "mopping-up" rush through a German trench he decided instantly that such danger as now threatened could come only from beyond the door, while the electric light switches must be situated in that section of the wall behind the farther jamb, unless some master-switch elsewhere had shut off the current at the main. At any rate, he ran that way, threw a light into an empty hall, found a switch, and the room itself was not only lit up, but, as he learned afterwards, the hall

and upstairs passages as well, because the men at the rear testified to the fact.

At that instant, by some instinct rather than actual knowledge gained by breathing through mouth and nostrils, he became aware that the mist-wraith which seemed to roll downwards from a hidden staircase instead of rising like smoke, was an enemy more deadly and irresistible than a whole platoon of armed men.

Leaping away from the door, the room being most fortunately flooded with light now, he shouted to Mac-Dermott, standing near the table, and Adamson, half way through the window:

“Back, for your lives! Poison gas!”

Picking up the limp body of Monica Jackson, whom he recognised at a glance, he ran round the other end of the table and made for the window, retaining his breath, and trying to press the girl’s mouth and nostrils against his breast. Even with these precautions he was just in time. As he thrust his burthen into the hands of the men outside, since the others obeyed his warning cry forthwith, he felt the faint touch of nausea which is the first warning of gas poisoning. He did not wait to climb out, but plunged forth headlong, careless whether or not face and hands met the litter of broken glass on the ground.

His right hand and left wrist were cut slightly, but he was on his feet in a second, only to know that his faculties were becoming dazed.

"Take care!" he wheezed, not realising that Mac-Dermott had grasped his arm. "Gas! They must—come out—or die!"

So slight was the attack of vertigo that his brain began to clear while the burly Superintendent supported him across the lawn to the cover of the trees.

"I'm all right now," he said valiantly. "A miss is as good as a mile, and I just missed swallowing a real dose. But that's a peculiarly vicious carbon monoxide. Is the girl dead?"

"I don't know. She is here, lying on the grass. Still, we cannot attend to her now. Can you stand fast, while I and the others cover a wider front?"

"Yes. I'll carry on. How about the men at the rear?"

"They're safe if they have obeyed orders. . . . Smith, move to the left, until you can see that side of the house. . . . Adamson, watch the greenhouse on the right. Sergeant Linton and I—"

A blinding flash of light, and an explosion which was heard as far away as Epsom and Horsham, came from the centre of the building, and the solid mass of masonry crumbled into ruin. Of course, it was the motor-

cyclist who described most accurately what took place. The six men stationed within a few yards of the house itself were so stunned by the shock that they were either hurled to the ground or collapsed weakly within the next second. No one was rendered absolutely unconscious, which was fortunate, because a fire which succeeded the explosion raged so fiercely that its heat was scorching, and some of the trees began at once to crackle ominously, while their heavy-laden branches groaned and creaked in the air-draught which the devouring flames called to their aid from Nature's Cave of the Winds.

MacDermott and Linton, each risen to hands and knees, saw as in a dream Monica Jackson's body stretched behind the clump of laurels. Though hardly able to stand upright they made for her, raised her somehow, contrived a "chair" by entwined arms and clasped hands, and carried her to a point about fifty yards down the drive, where they were met by Sergeant Hicks, hurrying to communicate the outcome of his inquiries.

"Good Lord, sir!" he quavered, "what has happened?"

"Someone struck a match, I fancy," wheezed the Superintendent, on whose bulk these few strenuous minutes had levied a stiff toll. "Take this girl to the gate.

Try and halt any passing motorists there till Linton and I make a circuit of the house. Send our cyclist to direct the fire engine. See that the road is kept open for it."

The big man's coolness was admirable. His companion, who knew what it meant to keep one's head when under fire, was able to appreciate the steady nerve which could issue a stream of connected orders at such a moment.

As Sergeant Hicks strode away Linton turned back with his chief to search for the four constables.

"I suppose you know how the house has been destroyed, sir?" he said.

"That sort of festivity is more in your line. Explain."

"It was intended that we should all be overpowered, if not actually killed, by the gas. Then an incendiary bomb was timed to end matters."

"And it did. Just look at that pillar of fire!"

Linton remembered the phrase afterwards, and was struck by its peculiar aptness. At the moment his wits were too bemused to be capable of other than wholly physical impressions. The volume and intensity of the roaring furnace within the shell of the house bespoke its chemical origin. The intent was not merely to burn and consume but to destroy utterly. Metal would yield

as readily as match-wood to such vehemence. The very stones were cracking and bursting. Unless the Dorking Fire Brigade arrived soon the surrounding boscage would widen the area of ruin very greatly.

One thing was certain—no living creature, man or beast, had escaped from the doomed house since the explosion, and, if anyone had emerged earlier, prompt detection was inevitable. The distant woods gleamed redly, and the branches and trunks of the trees were visible as in broad daylight. Each ridge and furrow of the nearer meadows stood out clearly. The white tails of scurrying rabbits could be seen three hundred yards away. On the path up the hill stood two badly frightened policemen, each gripping an automatic, and ready to shoot at the first moving shadow.

MacDermott laughed at sight of them.

"The next time those boys are put on special duty they'll walk like cats on hot bricks the moment they leave the station," he gurgled.

"Is this the end, then?" inquired Linton.

"Not a bit of it. The most desperate criminals are prepared so rarely to sacrifice their own lives that such an outcome of this affair may be disregarded. Those fellows have bested us somehow, yet I shall be more than surprised if they get away. Don't you see—this dramatic show was prepared for our benefit. If so,

they are safe at this moment. But how, and where? They cannot have gone by air, unless Jules Verne has come to life again, and is putting his romances to practical use. There is only one other way—underground. By the piper that played before Moses, that's it! They have a tunnel somewhere. Let's scatter! Here comes the Fire Brigade! The question is—”

The Superintendent told Linton later that the only problem they had to solve instantly was the probable direction and length of the tunnel which gave egress from the house. But his words were drowned by a loud hissing noise, and the fire died down in a cloud of white steam, which was succeeded by a darkness like unto that inflicted on the land of Egypt.

“We've lost our chance again!” he said bitterly. “This is chemical warfare, with a vengeance. We need enough men to enclose a half-mile radius, and there are six of us, with Heaven alone knows how many hundreds of people hurrying here from all directions, and every man jack among them rendered blind as a bat except the rascals who know just where to go. . . . Hello, what's that?”

“Come quickly, sir!” cried Linton. “Those men on the hill are shooting!”

Even as he ran his ears followed the fusillade which broke out on the path at the back of the house. He

counted nine shots in all, and the policemen's pistols held seven cartridges each. Had they been fortunate? Tearing his way through obstacles difficult enough to surmount by day but proving veritable dragons in the all-pervading gloom, he plunged through the garden, skirted the house, and, after a short but desperate struggle, stumbled into what he believed was the footpath.

CHAPTER IV

REINFORCEMENTS

Now he was literally compelled to use a flashlight. MacDermott lagged far behind, with one or both of the remaining policemen. Having made certain that he had not erred in direction, he shouted loudly, calling the constables by name. At last came a faint response:

"That you, Sergeant Linton?"

"Yes," he cried.

"Well, poor Cruddas has got his," was the reply. "He's lying here. . . . I'm hit in the right shoulder. . . . They came on us like magic—out of the ground. . . . I blazed away till I was knocked over. Like a kick from a horse it was."

Knowing full well that at any instant a red glare from out of the black pall which surrounded him might herald his own death or disablement, Linton shut off the electric torch while creeping onward swiftly. Then he allowed it to gleam again momentarily, and saw one of the policemen sitting up, pressing a handkerchief against his shoulder. Close at hand the other lay prone. Cutting off the light again, he reached the man who had spoken.

"Help is coming, Tomlin," he said. "Can you hold out a few minutes longer?"

"Oh, yes. I think so, Sergeant. It's beginning to burn, so the shock is over."

"Which way did they go, and how many were there?"

"Three men, and a woman, I think. Two of the men fired at us. They just rose out of the earth, behind the hedge."

"Who began the shooting?"

"They did, of course. Took us sideways."

"Where is your torch?"

"At my feet. I thought I'd try and stop the bleeding."

Linton groped on the path, and found the lamp.

"If I turn it on, and let it point down hill, the others will see it and come quickly. You'll be safe enough if that gang has gone towards the woods. They headed that way, I suppose?"

"I haven't the ghost of a notion, Sergeant. But you're never thinking of following them alone. They'll do you in that easy. And Cruddas should be looked to. I'd attend to him myself if I was able."

It was certainly a fantastic thing to dream of tracking three armed desperadoes through the wood to the road on the summit of Box Hill, but Linton was quivering with anger at the mere notion that the outlaws

might even yet be within reach, while none among them could cope with him in swiftness of movement and powers of endurance. He did, however, resolve to wait for MacDermott, whom he heard opening a gate which led from the back garden.

"This way, sir," he said. "We are here," and the light flashed its signal.

The Superintendent and his two aides were with him promptly; after a brief explanation, he asked permission to continue the pursuit with one of the constables.

"So that I may lose two more of my men!" exclaimed MacDermott. "What chance have you of success? Not one in a thousand. Meanwhile, who is to telephone every police-station in the district, and circulate a description of two men and a woman whom you alone have seen? . . . No, Linton. You make for the road. Get Sergeant Hicks and a couple of firemen to come and clear our casualties. Some motorist will rush them to the hospital. Try and persuade the driver of another car to take you and that girl, if she had not gone already, to headquarters. If the girl is not actually injured, ask my wife to look after her till I turn up. Then give a full description of events to the station sergeant, and let him get busy on the 'phone. Go to bed yourself as soon as possible, and be with me at 8.30, as you will have a full day tomorrow, and must

be fit for it. Wear plain clothes, and don't forget your warrant card."

A policeman, like a soldier, must obey orders unquestioningly.

"Yes, sir," said Linton, turning on his heel. He dared not trust himself to utter another word, else his temper might have blazed out in absolute insubordination, since he felt certain that his chief's decision was a blunder.

He found a state of utter confusion among the crowd of motorists and others on the road. A cloud of smoke-laden steam had settled down on them like a black fog, while cars and pedestrians, ably assisted by a snorting fire-engine, seemed to have blocked both approaches to the gate.

The main difficulty was that no one, except the police cyclist, knew what had happened, and even he was unable to say why a fire which had lit up the countryside for miles had not only gone out with a seemingly miraculous speed but had also contrived to wrap the whole neighbourhood in the darkness of a closed vault. But Linton had experience in handling men in such conditions, which were fairly comparable to an unexpected night attack on the Western Front during the Great War.

Having discovered that Monica Jackson was lying

unconscious in a limousine near the gate, he collected a small squad of police and civilians, instructed them how to force all cars to clear the road by drawing aside according to the traffic rules, and soon had space available for careful movement. By the time he was seated by the side of the insensible girl he saw lights coming down the drive, and knew that the wounded constables were being carried to the car which Sergeant Hicks had backed in to meet them.

He was at a loss to account for his companion's prolonged stupor, since he ascertained forthwith by her breathing and pulse that she was alive, and feared that she had been seriously if not mortally injured before her captors left the room in which they had allowed her to recover her wits. But he was well aware that his mind was not working normally, so, with a vigorous effort at self-control, he shut out all considerations save the paramount one—that he should be ready with a concise and simple description of the gang of murderers now at large somewhere in the district.

In the conditions, they could hardly have had a car in readiness at a prearranged rendezvous; at best, they must be walking to a definite hiding-place. Even in his disturbed mental state—due, as he knew quite well, to that almost imperceptible whiff of a deadly gas—the word “prearranged” was suggestive. The criminals

who had planned such a sequence of events as the gas, the explosion, the fire, and the liberation of another chemical agent powerful enough to extinguish the fire at the right moment to facilitate their escape, would surely have disguises in readiness. He must remember that probability in drawing up his report. Whatever else "mon vieux" did to change his appearance he could not alter the expression of his eyes. How clever of that girl, Margaret Mainwaring, to note those peculiar eyes! That was an excellent point. The eyes of an artist, a poet, a dreamer, she said they were. And Fred Blenkey's notion that the man was a Russian Pole! That would be helpful, too. He feared he might not have thought of those things himself.

But here he was at Dorking police-station, and trying to explain to Mrs. MacDermott why, at her husband's request, he was bringing an almost lifeless girl to her house long after midnight. Luckily, the good lady was more concerned about Monica Jackson than as to exact details of the night's happenings, so she and an alarmed maid-servant were left to deal with the sufferer.

Then Linton compelled his wits to the more urgent task, but at the back of his head was a certain sympathy with the Curzon-street household's anxiety; therefore, while he wrote: "All roads leading from Dorking should be searched at once and until long after

daybreak by strong and well-armed patrols for four persons, three men and a woman, wanted for attempted murder and on other charges," he gave the station-sergeant the Mayfair number, and was soon in touch with Lord Copmanthorpe's residence.

Naturally enough, neither the Honourable Peggy nor the butler had retired to rest. They were far too excited to think of sleep until driven to their rooms by sheer exhaustion. Indeed, Mr. Hobbs and the other servants had found it necessary to uncork two bottles of Lord Copmanthorpe's old port for the soothing of their shattered nerves, so Peggy was easily first in the race to the telephone.

"That you, Mr. Linton?" she said at once.

"Yes," he replied, curtly official, since he had no time to waste. "I rang up to tell you that your friend, Monica Jackson, is now being cared for by Mrs. Mac-Dermott, wife of the Superintendent of police at Dorking. She is—fairly well, I think. I'm sorry I can give no further information now. The wire is wanted for police purposes. Good-bye."

Mr. Hobbs wondered why his young mistress should look so annoyed when she conveyed the great news, and flounce off to her bedroom forthwith, leaving an order to be called at eight.

"One 'ud think she was vexed because poor Monica

had been found," he said confidentially to the cook, "yet there she's bin sitting up all night waitin' for a ring. Take it from me, Mrs. Simpson, there's more in this than meets the eye."

Which was a profoundly true remark, though Mr. Hobbs himself has never yet fully appreciated its Solomon-like wisdom. It is, however, one thing to pose as a domestic, but quite another to be treated as one. Peggy Mainwaring was convinced now that Acting-Sergeant Linton, no matter how good-looking and well-spoken he might be, suffered from an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

Still, her temperament was far too cheery that she should dwell on such absurdities, while the relief of knowing that Monica was safe brought its own reaction. Her head had hardly touched the pillow before she was asleep.

She was in the breakfast-room at half-past eight when the front door bell rang. Believing there might be additional tidings as to Monica's welfare she hurried to open the door of the breakfast-room, and was in time to hear a high-pitched and rather squeaky voice ask the under-footman to produce Mr. Hobbs as quickly as possible.

"*In-deed!*!" was the sarcastic reply. "*An' who might you be, may I ask?*"

"A very proper question, Jeames, though absurdly phrased," said the voice. "You really ought to have inquired my name and business, while such a little word as 'sir' would have supplied a polite addition. If the butler is still in his room let me see you skip upstairs two steps at a time, and tell him that Detective Inspector Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department, wants him at once. Perhaps he sleeps in the basement, but, whether high or low, send him here on the jump."

Meanwhile, the under-footman had caught sight of a closed car, with a driver in police uniform, waiting at the kerb, so he changed his note.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "If you come with me, I'll take you to Mr. Hobbs's sitting-room."

The Honourable Peggy appeared on the landing.

"Bring Mr. Furneaux here," she said. "Mr. Hobbs can join us when he is ready."

Like every other human being who met the famous detective for the first time, she was surprised, almost dismayed, when Furneaux confronted her. He did not measure up in any respect with her preconceived notions of Scotland Yard and its occupants. The detectives who had visited the house after the attack on Foster and the abduction of Monica were quite obviously policemen in plain clothes, but this bright-eyed,

natty little man, wearing a well-fitting grey tweed suit and carrying a straw hat, answered exactly to Superintendent MacDermott's description of him, and might have been either a "fashionable" jockey or a leading light in the stage world on its comedy side. She thought that the valiant men who pursued and caught criminals must carry with them the implements of their dangerous trade, yet she was sure Mr. Furneaux's pockets could not possibly harbour pistols, handcuffs or truncheons. He did not even carry a stick, while the smooth outlines of his waistcoat did not suggest the presence of a concealed match-box, much less of a deadly weapon.

"Did I understand you correctly?" she began, motioning her visitor to a chair. "Are you Detective Inspector Furneaux?"

"Yes," he said. "And you?"

"I am Miss Mainwaring."

"The girl who accompanied Monica Jackson to Box Hill yesterday?"

"Well—yes. You can put it that way, if you like."

"Suppose we put it another way, Miss Mainwaring. What is your exact position in this household?"

"I am Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter."

Furneaux's face seemed to be covered with parchment-coloured skin, which creased now with merriment,

recalling to the girl's mind the cheerful grin of some member of the Japanese Legation whom she had met socially.

"Ah!" he cackled. "They don't know that at Dorking, eh?"

"I gave them my name and address," said Peggy, trying to hide a blush behind a teacup. "By the way, have you breakfasted, Mr. Furneaux?"

"I have been doubtful, ever since I sniffed your bacon and egg," he admitted.

Mr. Hobbs entered at the moment, and showed his butler-like qualities by receiving with undisturbed gravity an unexpected order to procure more tea and the materials for a second breakfast.

"I take it you need not attend to these trivial matters in person, Mr. Hobbs," said the detective. "Each minute is valuable this morning, and I want to hear Miss Mainwaring's story and your own as to yesterday's events, while I eat."

"In one moment, sir," said Hobbs, hurrying out again.

"Do you wish him to know all about your personal adventures?" inquired Furneaux, whereat Miss Peggy lifted her eyebrows.

"Why not?" she said.

"It is not for a mere man, a shrimp of a fellow like

me, for instance, to enter into the complexities of a woman's mind, but I am under the impression that you were masquerading a little yesterday afternoon, Miss Mainwaring. If so, Mr. Hobbs, who is already sufficiently obtuse, may be left in that blissful state."

"But he knows everything!"

"Splendid! You, then, are the young lady whom the society newspapers describe as the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring?"

"Yes."

"But the Dorking police believe you are a lady's maid or companion?"

"Did Sergeant Linton say that?"

"Yes. The confession nearly choked him, but he had to make it."

"When next I see him I'll undeceive him. He was very rude to me last night."

"Indeed. Tell me about this."

"Oh, rudeness is a harsh term, perhaps, but he might have been more explanatory when he rang up to say Monica had been found. How is she?"

"Recovering rapidly, I am told. But let us keep to this matter of Sergeant Linton's rudeness. . . . Ah, sit down, Mr. Hobbs. I'll be ready for you in a moment. I think you are mistaken, Miss Mainwaring. Sergeant Linton had gone through an extraordinary experience,

for which, let me say in strict confidence, he is to be promoted and decorated, as he undoubtedly saved Monica Jackson's life by risking his own, risking it knowingly, too. Moreover, the wire was in demand for circulating descriptions of certain persons wanted by the police—very much wanted, I assure you. However, that is by the way. Please tell me, in your own words, all that happened yesterday."

The Honourable Peggy's eyes sparkled for an instant, as she felt that the little detective was treating her like a spoilt child, but sheer interest in the drama in which she had played some small part conquered this momentary pique, and she gave a lucid and consecutive account of events since the breakfast hour of the previous day. Mr. Hobbs corroborated, though his knowledge was slight. Neither he nor his mistress could supply any information as to the Curzon-street episode, because the malefactors in the car had vanished before the occupants of the house found Foster lying on the pavement.

Furneaux ate while he listened. He spoke once only, to assure his hearers that the detective, though seriously wounded, was regarded by the house sergeant at St. George's Hospital as not being in a hopeless condition.

Foster's vague and faltering recollection of his as-

sailant's appearance seemed to tally with Miss Mainwaring's equally vague portrait of the younger man she had seen in the roadway opposite the King's Head.

"It amounts to this," said Furneaux, "one or all of you three people in the tea garden—and Sergeant Linton almost certainly—may be able to recognise that scoundrel if you see him again at an early date. Or, again, you may not. Are you engaged today, Miss Mainwaring?"

"No, not particularly. Indeed, I was thinking of motoring to Dorking to see Monica."

"Just what I was going to suggest. I am calling for Superintendent Winter at headquarters, and then we make straight for Dorking. Will you come with us?"

"I shall be delighted. Shall I order the car?"

"I have one at the door."

Mr. Hobbs cleared his throat as a preliminary to speech, but Furneaux forestalled him.

"Exactly," he said, speaking, for him, with much gravity. "Mr. Hobbs was about to warn you against acting on impulse. You really should not be so ready to gad about with mere strangers. I may not be an emissary of Scotland Yard at all, but a plausible villain meaning to carry you off in broad daylight. Even the presence of a police chauffeur is no real safeguard, as uniforms can be bought from any theatrical costumier."

So Mr. Hobbs will accompany us as far as the Embankment, when both he and you will be convinced of my *bona fides*. That all right, Mr. Hobbs?"

The butler had really intended to protest against his young mistress's further participation in this extraordinary affair without Lady Copmanthorpe's cognisance, but yielded instantly to the prospect of a visit to the "Yard," with the reflected glory for himself in the servants' hall.

Somehow, Peggy sensed this, and could not help admiring the detective's tact.

"Very well," she said rising. "I'll just get a wrap, while you finish your toast, Mr. Furneaux. Five minutes—not a second longer."

"Just one moment," he cried. "Are you dressed today as you were yesterday?"

"No. Oh, no."

"Please take ten minutes, and change into the same costume. Mr. Hobbs will agree with me, I am sure, when I recommend that your actual identity need not be disclosed at Dorking."

"Won't Monica—"

"Let us take the chance, at any rate."

The butler now regarded Mr. Furneaux as a most sensible person—a model of discretion—but Peggy was sure that the detective was humbugging Hobbs, and

probably herself. She was convinced of this when his beady black eyes twinkled in response to her own smile.

She reappeared in the hall well within the stipulated time. The butler, whom Furneaux had warned not to say a word to anyone, though he twisted the advice into the semblance of its having originated in Mr. Hobbs's own judicial brain, was seated already by the side of the driver. It was then nine o'clock, and Peggy was actually throwing a dust-cloak over her shoulders when the telephone rang.

Furneaux nodded in response to the look of inquiry.

"Better see what is wanted," he said.

Peggy's response to the caller was free from all ambiguity.

"Sorry, Bobby," she said, "but I'm just going out. . . . I really don't know what time I shall return. . . . Of course, you're peeved, old thing, but I can't explain now—I've got to rush. . . . Yes, I'll ring you up at the Club, or somewhere. . . . What? . . . Oh, rubbish!"

"Lord Robert Ferris," she explained, tripping down the steps. "He was awfully hipped when I wouldn't tell him anything."

"It certainly is difficult sometimes to be explicit over the 'phone," agreed Furneaux. "Linton discovered that last night, I imagine."

Peggy shot a glance at him, but he was opening the door of the limousine.

"I'm sorry to have to take you out of town at such an early hour," he went on, as the car sped through Mayfair. "But, in a case like this, we are desperately anxious to get ahead of the newspapers. You see, by noon today all England will hear about Foster and the blowing up of that house at Dorking. We have just two working hours left—"

"The blowing up of what house, Mr. Furneaux?"

"Ah, I forgot. You have not heard what happened last night. Thanks to Linton's really brainy action, the police discovered at least one of these rascals' haunts. It was there he rescued Monica Jackson from the immediate death which threatened her in about half a dozen different ways. I said nothing of this before the estimable Hobbs, who would expire from spontaneous combustion if he tried to retain within his portly bosom the sensational story you will hear while we run to Dorking. I suppose you think I am taking you there to cheer up poor Monica Jackson? I'm not. She is ill, very ill, not physically but mentally. A local doctor thinks she will not recover her speech for a week at least. Indeed, I am doubtful if he will allow you or anyone else to see her, lest her memory should return too soon."

He paused, deliberately, his hearer thought.

"I'll ask questions or remain silent—whichever you wish, Mr. Furneaux," she said quietly.

He cracked the forefinger and thumb of his right hand joyously.

"The one woman in ten thousand!" he cried. "Well, here is your reward. I'll tell you something few people know. When I'm up against a really big affair, such as this promises to be, I feel, or think I feel, which is the same thing, the working of a sixth sense, which, in operation, resembles the action of static electricity. Do you know what that is?"

"If it's the new system of reading the meter it's a horrible fraud."

"A perfect reply, though weak as a definition. When two powerful bodies are in direct electric communication, another current, far less potent but definite enough, is set up parallel with the known one. It can hardly be accounted for, but it exists, and can be utilised. Some influence of the kind often reveals its presence in criminology. I am sure of it. In the present instance you and Sergeant Linton, quite unconsciously, of course, represent the opposite poles of that minor current which is flowing alongside the stream of evil forces which has drawn you within its area during the past few hours. While I am with either of

you, or both, I do honestly believe I shall be in closer touch with some far-reaching and tremendous scheme, or plot, designed for dire purposes whose scope I cannot yet even guess at. And now, please forget what I have told you, because my colleague, Mr. Winter, is convinced that my theorising is all moonshine, and will say so, forcibly, thus leading to a row, and you would be distressed if we bickered all the way to Dorking, which would be a sin on this lovely morning."

Peggy laughed.

"If Mr. Winter is as interesting in his own way as you are in yours, I shall have the time of my life during the next hour," she said. "But what in the world will happen when I meet Sergeant Linton? Will there be a sizz and a bang?"

"I hope not," said Furneaux emphatically. "You know what happens when a fuse gives way. All the lights go out, and there is a scurry for candles. May Heaven protect a great many innocent people if we are plunged again into darkness in this case, Miss Mainwaring! I believe, and I say it in all seriousness, that your sharp eyes yesterday, when they saw that half-crown burying itself between two kerb-stones, snatched a lightning glimpse of something which menaces our very life as a nation. . . . But, here we are. Have you ever before visited Scotland Yard? Its architecture is

beneath contempt, but it is a most interesting place, for all that. Its records range from the secrets of kings to the wanderings of lost umbrellas. . . . Ah, there is Winter, waiting for us. He is not smoking. A bad sign! He is worried. What's gone wrong now, I wonder?"

CHAPTER V

"THE YARD" IN ACTION

If the foregoing history of one complete day culled from the hitherto uneventful career of the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring has induced the belief that the young lady in question differed in any material attribute from the thousands of girls of her age and social position who abound in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia—wherever, in fact, English ideals and manners are inculcated from birth—such an impression, founded possibly on the tragic incidents with which she had been associated by fate, should be dissipated forthwith. She was merely a good-looking, healthy, well educated and pure-minded young woman. She had the ease and vivacity which spring from certain fine qualities of heart and brain when cultivated in an excellent soil and fostered by favourable environment. Owing to her youth the horrors of the Great War had left her unscathed. She was a devoted daughter, a most cheerful and amiable friend, an adept in many field sports, yet utterly feminine and unspoiled.

Hitherto, her life had been passed in pleasant places. Now, for the first time, she was brought face to face with some of the sordid elements in human affairs—things which she was hardly able to visualise when she read of them in newspapers and books. It is not surprising, therefore, that even the spiriting away of the parlour-maid and the attempted murder of Foster should fail to penetrate deeply into her immature consciousness. She regarded these happenings as somewhat on a par with a nasty fall after hounds, or with what she herself would describe as a regular purler on the ice. It is true she was frightened and tearful when the unfortunate detective was carried into the hall at Curzon-street by Hobbs and the under-footman, and she saw the dread evidence of the murderous attack which had been made on him. But the ingrained instincts of her social order demanded restraint and coolness in all circumstances, and she rose to the occasion, being far more self-possessed than the two men. For the hour, therefore, she was more curious and interested than shocked. Furneaux, versed in the complex of the feminine mind, appreciated her qualities to the full, and meant to use them without stint until Lord and Lady Copmanthorpe interfered, which would be about one minute by the clock after they realised what sort of

amazing experiences their only daughter was being committed to.

Peggy liked Mr. Winter at sight. He was big and solid and pre-eminently British, a man of oak reinforced by steel. His head, body and limbs were large and round. His prominent, wide apart blue eyes and expressive mouth seemed framed for humour and the sheer joy of existence rather than the analysis of crime and the pursuit of criminals. Equally with Furneaux he did not suggest the detective of either romance or actuality. Peggy found herself remembering, in one sense of the word, having met many such men at agricultural shows in the shires, or among the guns on her father's moors and pheasant drives.

If Mr. Hobbs were capable of entertaining the suspicions put into his well-ordered domestic brain by Furneaux they were banished for ever by the respectful demeanour of those members of the staff at New Scotland Yard who entered or left the building during the couple of minutes the Chief stood in the doorway. When Mr. Winter was introduced to Miss Mainwaring, he expressed approval of her presence, though somewhat guardedly. Then he beckoned to a young but grave-looking man in mufti, who seemed to be awaiting orders.

"Sheldon," he said, "I shall be at the Dorking head-

quarters by noon. Give me a ring should anything special turn up. Don't go out until you hear from me. You know as much of this business as I or Mr. Furneaux, so take any action you think fit if the occasion arises."

"How odd!" said Peggy, when the car was *en route* again.

"What strikes you as odd, Miss Mainwaring?" inquired Winter, who, to Furneaux's delight, had been eying her covertly.

"The man you spoke to has one eye smaller than the other, or the other eye bigger than the one. Which is it?"

"Both. You are reported already as a close observer. Not many young ladies would have noted such a peculiarity at a glance."

"Is that what Police-Sergeant Linton said about me?"

"Yes, but he also is intelligent."

"Please, won't you smoke?"

Winter whisked round on Furneaux instantly.

"Have you been taking away my character?" he demanded wrathfully.

Furneaux's wrinkled features registered, as the "movies" have it, a pained surprise.

"I?" he chirped. "I only said you were not smok-

ing, which is a sign that your normal state of fatuous complacency has been disturbed."

"But won't both of you smoke?" put in Peggy timidly. She had yet to learn that the Big 'Un and Little 'Un of the Yard, when hot on the trail of evildoers, snapped at each other like an ill-tempered mastiff and an impudent terrier.

"The gallant caballero by your side, Miss Mainwaring, needs only the merest whiff of encouragement to produce a series of gigantic Havanas, which he partly smokes and partly eats," explained Furneaux bitterly. "The nauseating habit is the bane of my life, as I hold that tobacco not only atrophies the senses but—"

"It is a closed car," broke in Winter. "Would you care for a cigarette yourself, Miss Mainwaring?"

"Well, just one, if Mr. Furneaux doesn't really—"

"What? Don't mind him. He has other compensating vices. Now, before he can deliver his stock essay on the deleterious effects of nicotine—of course, not being a smoker, he poses as an authority on the habit—tell me something about Monica Jackson. What sort of girl is she? Would you regard her as of well-balanced mind?"

"Oh, yes. She is bright, and agreeable, and most

willing and contented. Mother says she is a model servant.”

“Mother?”

“Yes. Lady Copmanthorpe, you know.”

“I ought to have told you that this young lady is the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring,” said Furneaux suavely.

Winter did not hesitate a fraction of a second.

“Just so,” he said, favouring his *aide* with a frosty smile. “I have been so busy this morning that the peculiar intricacies of family names in the British peerage escaped my attention. Even in the ‘Yard,’ Miss Mainwaring, we supply similar puzzles for strangers. For instance, Mr. Furneaux is known as ‘Frog.’ ”

“In such trivial matters the aristocracy shows more wit and much better taste than the police,” commented Furneaux.

Peggy tittered, though fully alive to the fact that half an hour earlier the little man had been no more aware of her identity than his Chief.

“I rather connived at a sort of alibi yesterday,” she confessed. “You see, father is ill in Scotland, and mother has rushed away to nurse him, and she would be dreadfully upset if she heard that I was actually mixed up in this affair. Of course, I shall write her

fully today, but I really don't want her to see my name in the newspapers first."

"Mr. Winter having now scored heavily all round—mark you, I say 'heavily'—perhaps it will be as well if I reveal what took place near Dorking at a late hour last night," said Furneaux. "I am not usurping my Chief's prerogative. It will take him at least five minutes to get that wretched cigar to draw properly."

Thenceforth, for the time being, at any rate, all banter ceased between the two, and Peggy was given an astonishingly full and accurate account of the Dorking drama. MacDermott had supplied the whole story over the 'phone that morning about half-past seven. Some of it was new even to Winter. When his colleague made an end he said thoughtfully:

"This man, Linton, strikes one as being rather out of the common. Who is he?"

"At present an Acting-Sergeant in the Surrey County Constabulary. MacDermott says he will now be made an Acting-Inspector."

The eyes of the two men exchanged the unspoken word. Unknown to Peggy, the Chief did not utter the thought in his mind, since it was quite obvious that Furneaux had not answered his question.

"I hope we shall meet him this morning," was what he said.

“Oh, yes. That is arranged. MacDermott sent him straight to bed about one o’clock, so that he might be fresh for today’s hazards. Old Mac himself remained up all night. He will not escort us through the ruins, but promises to have luncheon ready soon after 12:30.”

“It will be thrilling to hear what Mr. Linton really saw when he went into that awful place,” commented Peggy.

Her companions looked at her, and smiled, Furneaux with approval, and Winter with an air of astonishment.

“It is a pity you are the daughter of a Cabinet Minister,” said the Chief. “I could promise you a job in the C.I.D. without delay.”

“You have a very important one now, at any rate,” cried Furneaux.

“Does that mean I am what Americans call ‘a live wire’? How flattering! But I feel I know so little, and I dread asking for information.”

“Why?” demanded Winter.

“Because—because you two may have in your minds a great many facts which cannot be divulged to an outsider like myself.”

“No,” said Winter reflectively. “That is not so. We have under remand a pestilent fellow who was caught

selling a peculiarly dangerous drug in a Regent-street restaurant the other night, and on him was found a half-crown marked almost in the same way as that which you discovered for us. There are indications, too, that the *morale* of some of the public services is being undermined in a subtle but quite indefinite way. That is all. The combined outrages of last night may or may not be connected with these other circumstances. The whole affair is rather bewildering. It is evident that 'mon vieux' and his associates set out for London the moment they ascertained Monica Jackson's address. Their only object then could be to force from her some understandable reason why the damaged half-crown had been changed for another. But she did not know. Neither did her friend, Fred. I incline to the view that in the ordinary course of events she would have been questioned closely, and bundled out of the car unharmed on some lonely road if she retained her wits, and said nothing about Sergeant Linton. But the appearance of Foster on the scene altered the situation entirely. Her captors saw then that the police were on their track, and it was vital for their safety that they should probe the full extent of the girl's knowledge. That is why they kept her under the partial influence of an anæsthetic all the way to Dorking, and threatened her with torture the moment she was allowed to regain

her senses. From the manner in which the house was first protected and then destroyed, with even a tunnel provided to facilitate the escape of the occupants, it is clear they expected, sooner or later, to attract the attention of the authorities. That their plan failed was due to no fault of theirs. In this case we have to deal with a master mind, an intelligence of the highest order—”

“You see, therefore, how justice is handicapped from the outset,” Furneaux could not refrain from saying.

Winter waved aside the interruption with a certain magnificence of gesture.

“I believe,” he went on, “that science rather than police experience of criminal methods will have to solve the problems before us. Admitted that a battered half-crown does not call for treatment by test tubes and retorts, it is possible that the coin, as a symbol, may have a psychological basis. Whole continents have been plunged into war by queer tokens of the kind. The Indian Mutiny was foreshadowed by the passing from village to village of a *chupat*si**, or baked cake made from millet, while Africa can supply scores of instances of similarly far-fetched but potent influences. Usually, as Mr. Furneaux knows, I leave to him such strange delvings into the peculiarities of human nature—”

Unluckily, the Chief's active brain balked for an instant, so his waspish *aide* seized the opportunity.

"But as this affair seems to spring from a warped mentality, you of course, feel competent to analyse it." he broke in.

Sad to relate, for a girl so carefully brought up, Peggy was beginning to enjoy the society of these most ridiculous detectives. Her difficulty was to separate the wheat from the chaff in their talk, as she could not be quite sure when they were in earnest and not merely engaged in the harmless pastime generally known as pulling each other's leg.

She, however, being singularly clear-minded, remembered everything they said, literally, that is, and quite apart from the significance the words seemed to bear at the moment they were uttered.

"Why did you ask me if I regarded Monica Jackson as—how did you put it?—of well-balanced mind?" she inquired.

"Because she seems to have yielded rather suddenly to the strain placed on her," said Winter promptly.

"Is she really very ill, then?"

"Not ill, but shocked out of her wits. You see, it is a fair deduction that she was kept in a semi-conscious state for an hour and twenty minutes. She is physically uninjured, so she could only have heard certain threats,

and, no matter how terrible they may have sounded, or appeared, she was not subjected to them longer than five minutes. The very fact that she must have been partly under the influence of an anæsthetic argues a condition of less than normal mental susceptibility. What, then, caused such a collapse that a doctor at Dorking should assure us that her brain will not function properly during the next seven days, at least?"

"Poor Monica!" murmured Peggy, and her eyes glistened with imminent tears.

"Do you know that we are passing the house where Nelson lived for many months together when not at sea?" said Winter, after a pause.

"Please don't stop talking about this horrid business just because I sympathised with Monica's sufferings," protested Peggy.

Winter laughed cheerfully.

"I haven't another word to say about it," he cried. "I have only been theorising, a bad habit caught from Mr. Furneaux."

"The only interesting fact you have staged thus far is the reference to Nelson's residence at Merton," snapped the little man readily. "I suppose even a well brought-up young lady like you, Miss Mainwaring, has read of his love affair with Lady Hamilton, and has

admired the fair Emma's portraits by nearly all the famous artists of her period? Well, the other day I chanced on the memoirs of a French countess, who, as a little girl, appeared in *tableaux vivants* with Lady Hamilton at Naples, and I was surprised to learn that the lovely creature was very fat."

"Whereas Nelson was thin as a herring," added Winter.

Peggy began to understand that her queerly assorted companions played into each other's hands with singular skill. Indeed, not another word did they utter about the business of the hour until the car halted at a gate on the left side of the Leatherhead-Dorking road, and a policeman peered in through the open window.

"Will you please give me your names?" he said.

Then he signed to a colleague to open the gate. MacDermott had certainly taken care that no unauthorised persons should visit the scene of last night's extraordinary occurrences until the police inquiry ended.

The car ran on nearly to the front door of the house. It was stopped abruptly by a tall young man in a grey suit, golfing cap and brown shoes, who called out to the driver:

“Pull up, or your tyres will be cut to ribbons by broken glass.”

Then he looked into the car.

“May I ask?—” he began, but his glance fell on Peggy.

“*You* here, Miss Mainwaring?” he cried, evidently prepared to disbelieve his eyes.

“Sergeant Linton?” said Winter.

“Yes, sir.”

“Ah! I am Superintendent Winter. This is Mr. Furneaux. Fortunately, Miss Mainwaring was at liberty this morning, so we brought her with us.”

Linton smiled a welcome, though his reply was strictly official.

“I am glad you are in the centre of a police cordon today,” he said, permitting an appreciative glance to dwell for a moment on the girl’s eager, slightly flushed features. “We know now that you were in a position of very real peril yesterday afternoon. It is only the mercy of Providence which saved you from sharing the fate of your friend, Monica.”

Winter happened to catch an almost imperceptible drooping of Furneaux’s left eyelid, so he said nothing, being interested, too, in the Honourable Peggy’s attitude. She, however, ignored everything save the ap-

parent implication that Monica's illness had taken a bad turn.

"She is not any worse this morning, I hope?" she said in quick alarm.

"No. Somewhat quieter, the doctor thinks, but he finds it hard to judge, she has swallowed so much bromide. Last night I thought she was dying or dead. By some rascally means she was driven clean out of her senses."

"Ah!" said Winter. "Tell us just what happened after you and the others surrounded the house."

By this time the four were standing on the carriage-way between the ruined walls and the flower-bed. Linton pointed out the clump of laurels which had screened MacDermott, the two policemen, and himself. In simple, soldierly language he explained the sequence of events, and two, at least, of his hearers were surprised by his manner and appearance. Winter, of course, had never before either met him or heard him speak. Peggy, who had noted his well-bred air during the few words they exchanged outside the King's Head Hotel, was even more bewildered now. She knew that an Acting-Sergeant of Police must have been an ordinary constable not so long ago, whereas this young man was as well-spoken and conventionally correct as her friend and devoted admirer, Lord Robert Ferris.

But these minor considerations fled before the tense interest of his recital. He had learnt the trick of literal accuracy rather than using generalities in stating facts, and Peggy shivered when he told of Monica's horror-stricken cry: “Ah, no, for God's sake! Not that! Not that! Take it away!”

None interrupted until he spoke of what he had seen through the broken window, the open black box on the table, the meal spread but not consumed, the hardly visible form of a woman, and the something which scuttled out of sight under an arm-chair.

“Scuttled!” cried Furneaux. “Why do you use that word?”

“Well, I hardly know,” admitted Linton. “It is the one which occurs most readily.”

“Might not this thing, whatever it was, have wriggled?”

“Yes.” He hesitated a moment. “By Jove!” he cried then, gazing at the diminutive detective with wide-open eyes.

“A snake, of course! What else?” squeaked Furneaux. “What did the first woman hate and dread more than any other created object? Why has every woman born since Eve was expelled from the Garden of Eden hated and feared serpents, though, in countless millions of cases, she may never have seen one save in

captivity? That fellow, ‘*mon vieux*,’ must be a veritable devil. How well he knew how to chill the very soul in an impressionable girl by suddenly producing a snake which he threatened to allow to bite her if she refused to talk!”

Peggy was too thrilled for words. Linton realised at once that he was listening to a deduction which could only be arrived at by genius, but Winter brought them back to actuality by saying:

“Is that room entirely destroyed?”

“Absolutely, sir. The condition of the outer walls is bad enough, but the interior of the house was consumed by a chemical fire of quite extraordinary fierceness. It did not rage longer than a couple of minutes, yet look at the havoc it wrought on the trees.”

The Chief nodded. Those prominent blue eyes of his had taken in a great many details already.

“Have the ruins been searched?” he asked.

“No, sir. Mr. MacDermott persuaded the Chief of the Fire Brigade to leave them as they are. In the first place, no form of life could have survived the flood of poison gas. Secondly, he could not be sure the firemen themselves might not be sacrificed to no purpose, and, thirdly, he wanted you and Mr. Furneaux to find the place untouched by other hands.”

“Good! I expected as much from your Superintend-

ent, whom I have known for years. Well, Sergeant, now that the third chapter of Genesis has supplied a clue, go on with your story.”

Linton told of the gas-cloud appearing, but glossed over the risk he took in waiting to carry Monica Jackson to safety. He gave a vivid word-picture of the explosion and the fire, and the almost tangible blackness which shrouded the locality when some chemical fire-extinguisher was freed, probably by a time-fuse.

Cruddas and Tomlin, he explained, were doing well, as Cruddas, though apparently the worse injured of the two, had escaped a fatal abdominal wound by the buckle of his belt having diverted the bullet.

“We have found the exit of the tunnel,” he went on, “but, here again, it was decided to await your arrival before searching it. I have a number of gas masks in readiness, and I suggest, with all deference, that they should be worn by those who enter.”

“Why?”

“The heavy chlorine gas used in the house would flow into the drains and cellars, and it is doubtful that either the explosion or the fire expelled it thoroughly. One whiff means instant death. Why take a chance?”

“You took a dozen chances when you ran round that

table, grabbed Monica Jackson off the couch, and thrust her through the window," said Winter.

Linton blushed like any flurried school-girl.

"I acted then without thinking," he explained hesitatingly. "Now, it is different. I have been here an hour, and have had plenty of time to survey the ground."

"What do you say, Furneaux? The tunnel first?"

Winter seemed to be suddenly galvanised into action. He almost startled Peggy by his change of manner.

"By all means," agreed his colleague. "It has probably caved in. But what does that matter? The tunnel is the obvious. Let us get rid of it. Linton, will you act as guide?"

"But, please, what becomes of me?" pleaded Peggy.

"You remain where you are till we come back," smiled the Chief.

"May I not walk through the grounds?"

"Mr. Furneaux has just reminded us that young ladies who stroll through gardens unaccompanied are apt to get into mischief. But, if you promise absolutely to keep well away from the house, I see no reason why you should not circle it. Indeed, you may come with us to the mouth of the tunnel. You will be inter-

ested. Furneaux in a gas mask in a grotesque of the first order.”

“Whereas my respected Chief wears one quite naturally,” said Furneaux.

Sergeant Linton looked puzzled, as well he might, but Peggy stifled a giggle by a cough.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE TUNNEL

"By the way, sir," said Linton, as they skirted the dismantled dwelling, "may I ask if there is any news of the gang?"

"None whatever," said Winter. "They seem to have vanished off the map. You were remarkably prompt in circulating those descriptions last night, and I may tell you that we, too, took a hand the instant the report reached us. Every police-station within a radius of fifteen miles was stirred into extra activity. On the outskirts of London, between one and five o'clock in the morning, no man or woman passed along the main roads leading from the south who was not scrutinised most carefully. Yet, the result was nil. But the inventiveness of the lunatic who expended time, money and thought in preparing this refuge—or, it may be, headquarters—did not stop short when he and his companions emerged from the tunnel. He had other cards up his sleeve, and, confound him, he may not play them now, as he is well aware that the whole country has been roused. Seen any reporters yet?"

"They are here in scores, but Mr. MacDermott's foresight has kept them at a distance."

"There is a guard over the tunnel, of course?"

"Yes. Three men."

"Send one to find the newspaper correspondents and tell them that I shall be ready for an interview at Dorking about noon. We must arrange, too, to give the photographers a show, on a strict understanding that no pictures of Miss Mainwaring or you, yourself, are published. If you spot anyone snapping us, go for him at once, and tear the negative out of the camera."

This, thought Linton, sounded more like the real thing. Otherwise—always excepting Furneaux's lightning-like deduction of the presence of a snake in the dining-room when Monica Jackson screamed in terror—these queer detectives spoke and acted strangely. Next came another perplexity, however, when he saw how quickly they adjusted the gas-masks. He was prepared to instruct them in the use of such safeguards but they were ready before he was, as he had to secure a small cage containing a pair of canaries.

The tunnel emerged in the middle of a thicket of briars. It had a trap-door which could be bolted only from beneath, and a flight of boarded steps led to a

gallery walled and roofed by stout planks. Talking, of course, was difficult, but was hardly needed. By counting paces they had barely reached the foundations of the outer offices of the house before further progress became impossible. Furneaux was right again; the passage had collapsed just where it became important.

Linton turned his torch on to the birds, which were hopping about in alarm, their tiny black eyes seeming to inquire why they were being treated in this fashion.

He took off his mask.

"It is all right," he said. "These little fellows are susceptible to the slightest trace of gas in the air."

"So am I," said Furneaux, grabbing Winter by the shoulder. "Let us get out of this, quick!"

Some hint of instant danger in his voice led the others to draw back a hurried pace from the fall of earth in front. There was barely room for two to walk abreast, so Winter led, Furneaux followed, and Linton brought up the rear, though all three were close together.

"What is it now?" demanded the Chief coolly.

"The walls are much more solid here—to check the force of the explosion, perhaps—and a thin wire is

stretched tightly across the floor at a height of two inches, not a yard short of the fall."

"Let *me* have a look," said Linton. "That has a familiar sound."

Suiting the action to the word, he crept on again, and sank to his knees, while his companions bent over him. The combined glare of three torches showed clearly now that which Furneaux's alert eyes had detected. A fine, rusted wire passed between two upright battens on one side, but, on the other, ran from the mouth of a small iron pipe.

"In all likelihood we have just missed exploding a contact mine," said Linton. "This is the sort of thing Heinie used to plant under a *pickel-haube* or a pair of binoculars in an abandoned dug-out. Once, he even used a cross marking the grave of a fallen Highlander. You must get some Sappers to detonate it, as it will be a constant menace."

"A pretty complete job these blighters made of their arrangements," growled Winter. "Good Lord! What a grudge they must have against the police!"

"I would prefer to discuss the matter further in the open air," urged Furneaux. "This place is distinctly unhealthy. Where one of these infernal machines exists there may be others, and Heaven alone knows in what nooks and corners that girl is prowling!"

Linton rose so suddenly that he cannoned against Winter.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but Mr. Furneaux is absolutely right."

The Chief was well aware that his *aide* was indulging in a sardonic grin; his own features had lost their good-humoured aspect, for he was steeped in conjecture as to the motive underlying so many deadly preparations before ever a crime was committed.

"Let us pause and consider," said Furneaux, when they stood under the blue sky once more. "On second thoughts, it is evident that if any wire connections existed in the garden they must have been disturbed long since, but, just to make sure, Sergeant, you might bring Miss Mainwaring here. Tell her what we have found. It will save time."

Linton darted a sharp look at the little man before he hurried away. Was Furneaux befooling him?

"Now, listen to me, Charles—" began Winter severely, but Furneaux's ivory-tinted face wrinkled with delight.

"Why shouldn't we introduce a touch of comic relief into our tragedy?" he cackled. "The cream of the joke is that you don't see it. The Honourable Peggy, only daughter of a peer who is also a Cabinet Minister

and Home Secretary, regards Linton as an ordinary policeman, which vital drawback alone restrains her from flirting with him. Our smart young friend, Captain Arthur Mountstuart Linton, D.S.O., late machine-gun officer of the East Kents, happens to be a nephew of the Chief Constable of a neighbouring county, who is retiring next January after thirty-five years' service, and, in the meantime, keeping the job warm for Master Arthur. But, as you know, County Councils prefer to appoint men with actual police experience, so Linton, whom I regard as a first-rate youngster, is going through the mill in Surrey, and will be an Acting-Superintendent before Christmas. The beauty of the present situation is that he believes Miss Peggy to be a lady's maid, or something of the sort, in the Copmanthorpe household, so he is throttling his obvious admiration for her. Marriage with a girl in her position wouldn't do, at all, at all, as they used to say in Cork when Ireland was lazy and happy. In the language of dramatic criticism, the situation is piquant. Pity it can't last more than a day or two."

"Why should we allow these young people to occupy a false position?"

"False fiddlesticks! A police-sergeant may marry a lady's maid!"

"But a peer's daughter would look higher than a County Chief Constable."

"So, why worry? The only person who has a kick coming is Lord Robert Ferris."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"A young spark in the Guards, deeply interested in the fair Peggy."

"Who told you that?"

"She did, after breakfast."

"You certainly are the limit. I don't know what the Commissioner will say to all this if Lord Copmanthorpe cuts up rough."

"James, before we scotch this snake a united cabinet will hang on our slightest word."

"Possibly. But here come the two! Now, remember, no more match-making. Let events take their course."

"They always do," murmured Furneaux. "Well, Sergeant, have you duly alarmed Miss Mainwaring by a realistic description of the unexploded mine?"

"Well—yes."

"Not quite sure, eh? What has he been talking about?" and Furneaux turned his smiling eyes on Peggy.

"He was rather anxious to learn how I managed to get away from Curzon-street so easily, but I explained

that my people are in Scotland, so all I had to do this morning was to exercise a Sealyham in the Park, which the under-footman is now attending to quite satisfactorily, I hope."

Linton may have wondered why the other three should laugh, as though the girl had said something exceedingly funny. He was, of course, blissfully unaware of the adroitness with which, by being quite candid, she had maintained her rôle.

"Have you propounded any new and startling theory during my absence?" he said, rather curtly, since the representatives of the "Yard" seemed ready to discuss any topic under the sun rather than the serious business of the moment.

"Have we?" inquired Furneaux, gazing at Winter.

"No," said the Chief promptly. "Furneaux is itching to spring a surprise on us, but I quelled him until you returned. We are keeping nothing back from you, Sergeant, as we want you to share fully in this man-hunt."

"Then may I venture to tell you first what Miss Mainwaring has discovered? She looked into a damaged rainwater barrel outside the garage, which, by the way, contains a Ford car, and found this."

Linton unfolded a wet rag which had been crumpled

up in his right hand, and revealed the back part of the collar of a lady's cloth coat. The material was grey in colour, and smooth in texture. A bit of merino lining adhered to the cloth, which had been badly charred. Indeed, it appeared to have escaped total destruction only by being blown into water. The vital importance of the exhibit lay in the fact that a tab stitched between cloth and lining bore a name and address: "Maison Marnier, Rue Blanc, Paris," and a number, "17,008."

The detectives examined Peggy's "find" in silence.

"You're fortunate, Miss Mainwaring," said the Chief at last. "We certainly did not err in bringing you here this morning. This may prove more than useful."

He wrote something on a leaf of his notebook, and called a policeman, instructing him to ring up a certain number in Whitehall, ask for Inspector Sheldon, and say that Mr. Winter wished him to telephone Paris for information concerning the tab.

"Go to the first house which has a telephone," the Chief added. "You'll see the wire."

"Would you mind if he 'phones from Dorking police-station?" broke in Furneaux.

"Not in the least."

"There won't be much delay, sir," said the constable.
"I have a bicycle at the gate."

"You and I were really thinking of the same thing, Chief," said Furneaux, seating himself beneath a tree, and tucking his knees within his arms. "As usual, you are material, I psychic. I know you loathe the word, but it is descriptive, and sufficiently vague. Yet, my line of reasoning is clear enough. Our opponents can hardly have failed to learn by this time that none of the Dorking police suffered by the destruction of the house. They may even have found out that Monica Jackson was rescued. Therefore, they are anxious now to make sure that the mine in the tunnel has not failed. You seem to understand these fiendish contrivances, Sergeant Linton. What is a simple method of detonation?"

"One might pay out a length of strong cord from a safe distance, attach it to the wire, and pull hard when all was clear."

"Splendid! If only we had the cord!"

Linton laughed, as he stooped over a folded mackintosh which had concealed the cage.

"Pardon this display of omniscience," he said, "but here it is! Allow me to explain that I intended it merely for measurements, if needed."

"Ah, you are young enough to afford to throw away

opportunities. I, in your place, would have paralysed my hearers by producing the cord in silence."

"We take that for granted," said Winter drily. "What are you driving at? If you imagine I had in mind any such idiotic scheme—"

"You'll be sorry you said that, James," cackled Furneaux, in the high-pitched tone he adopted almost insensibly when thoroughly aroused. "What I meant by the allusion to your materialistic brain was that you thought of the neighbouring houses as containing telephones, whereas I, using some sensitive mental equipment which God has given me, regarded them only as possible observation posts for the enemy. The same remark holds good of nearly every tree among the thousands on two hill-sides. A scout posted anywhere within half a mile can follow our every action quite plainly through powerful binoculars or a telescope."

Winter lighted a cigar. Furneaux, with the reticence of a skilled actor, affected a humility which ignored his Chief's failure to offer further criticism.

"Consequently, I suggest now that a great display be made of hunting around for spades and pick-axes. Something of the kind must exist in the out-houses."

"We have a supply in readiness," said Linton.

Furneaux eyed him with seeming disfavour.

"Young man," he chirped, "your prevision is almost uncanny. It might disturb me if I had not seen those useful implements stacked in the front shrubbery. Have you a two-foot rule?"

"A six-foot rule."

"And a pocket compass?"

"Yes."

"Pray keep them. They are not necessary. I only want you to refrain from interruptions. As I was saying—we four, presuming we have been seen already, go down into the tunnel, accompanied by four strong-armed bobbies armed with trench-tools. The policemen should remove their hats and tunics, leaving them out of sight in front of the house. Once we have descended the steps we crawl out again. You will have noticed that the dry brake in which the trap-door is situated is well screened by trees and undergrowth, so, if Miss Mainwaring does not object to risking some damage to her skirt and blouse, seven of us should be able to creep some thirty yards, or so, unseen. If we lie flat we ought to be fairly safe there, I take it?"

He paused. Winter looked at Linton, who remained silent.

"Our authority on mines does not dispute the statement," went on Furneaux glibly. "Sergeant Linton, meanwhile, who is unanimously elected to the post of honour, arranges his demonstration. When the explosion occurs, if it does occur, there ought to be plenty of smoke and dust to enable us—the whole eight, I trust—to gain the shelter of the trees in front of the house without detection. I see no reason why I should consider our next course of action. Before the rocket goes up we must post on the main road, at a distance of a mile, or somewhat less, two strong and well-armed patrols, who will stop and inquire into the business and identity of any adult passing in either direction leading from this locality, being especially careful in their examination of cyclists and the like. Foreign servants, hurrying on their employers' affairs, should be detained without discrimination, and this instruction should hold good till"—he consulted a wrist-watch—"say, half past eleven, after which hour traffic will be allowed to flow freely once more. The patrols can almost disregard people hurrying this way. If the mine is sufficiently noisy it will cause all the alarm and confusion the most exacting stage manager could ask for."

"Please, will there be any danger for—for anyone?" inquired Peggy timidly.

"Sergeant Linton, an expert in such matters, assures us that the operation is simplicity itself."

At any other time, Furneaux would have chortled over the girl's anxiety and the embarrassed flush which tinted Linton's bronzed features with russet, but his eyes had met Winter's, and some occult message passed between the two.

"The plan is worth a trial," announced the Chief suddenly, with the air of a man who had made up his mind to risk much on an uncertainty. "Let us get busy at once."

"One moment, sir," broke in Linton, and his voice had a curiously authoritative ring. "It must not be forgotten that the period of risk covers at least five seconds after the explosion. If it is a heavy one, baulks of timber and large stones may be hurled over a periphery extending hundreds of feet, though I admit that the probable object of the mine is only to kill anyone in the tunnel when it is fired. In any event, Miss Mainwaring must be protected fully. You must all lie flat on your faces, and remain there till I shout 'All clear!' The men should endeavour to shield Miss Mainwaring by their bodies; as to that there can be no question. Choose a place under a large tree. I recommend that oak a little

higher up. I'll not detonate the mine until you tell me you are ready."

"Don't be alarmed on Miss Mainwaring's account," cried Furneaux. "Fate is by way of being a humourist. If anyone gets a rap on the head by a falling brick it will be the author of this particular star turn."

Winter nodded, however, so Linton said no more. Indeed, he was silenced effectively by being requested to remain with the young lady he was so anxious to safeguard while the detectives carried through the preliminary arrangements.

"Didn't lose any time in taking command, did he?" snapped Furneaux under his breath, as he and the Chief hurried away. "He wanted to bite old Mac-Dermott's head off when he was ordered not to chase three if not four armed criminals through a dark wood last night. Mac told me he stalked off like a haughty peer."

"Shut up, you imp! He's a plucky lad, and you know you love him for it."

"Shield her by our bodies, indeed!"

"Well, he couldn't possibly have meant you."

"Ah! You felt the barbed dart, too. Why not admit it? You are infernally short-tempered this morning.

You must have risen too early. You beefy fellows require plenty of sleep.

O magic sleep! O comfortable bird
That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind
Till it is hushed and smooth.

"Of course, you don't read Keats. Who does, nowadays? Yet, he was a great poet, and he wrote those lines in the inn at Burford Bridge, which you see nestling in this delightful valley less than a mile away."

"Never have I known of any quotation being dragged in by the scruff of the neck more disgracefully," snorted Winter.

They were passing the two policemen guarding the tunnel, who heard all they were meant to hear of this conversation.

"Them's the swell 'tecs from the Yard," muttered one to his comrade.

"Well, if you hadn't tolle me, I'd ha' thought they was a pair of lunatics by their talk," said the other.

"If they are, it's a case of set a thief to catch a thief. The chaps who blew up this fine house for nothing must ha' bin balmy, too."

"Who's the girl?"

"How do I know? She kem down with them two. Our smart sergeant has made a hit in that quarter."

"Oh, Mr. Linton's all right. He don't look at no girls. An' he can keep his eyes shut at other times, as well. I was havin' a pint in the yard of the Black Bull the other evenin', an' me in uniform, too, when in comes his nibs an' another toff in a car. Of course, he was off duty, but he pretended he never sawr a thing."

Nevertheless the "smart sergeant" was deeply interested in Miss Margaret Mainwaring. The "Yard" was hardly out of earshot before he apologised for his abruptness over the 'phone the previous night.

"I could not help myself," he explained, with a frank smile which the Honourable Peggy regarded as uncommonly attractive. "You see, I am rather a novice in a big affair such as this promises to be, so I did not know how far I might be justified in telling you what had happened. In fact I took a chance in ringing you up at all."

"Then you have not been a policeman very long?" said Peggy, hoping to make amends, even to her own conscience, for her over-night irritation by showing some degree of sympathy with his hopes of professional advancement.

"No. Only about six months."

"But—haven't you got on very rapidly?"

"Yes. I am fortunate in that."

"I suppose it's horribly wrong of me, but I do feel I want to be the first to tell you, if you don't know it already. You're to be made an Inspector for what you did last night."

Evidently he was surprised.

"How can you possibly be sure of that?" he cried.

"Mr. Furneaux said it. Someone told him. A Chief Constable, I think. For goodness' sake don't let on I said a word about it. I believe he thinks well of me, and I should be sorry to lose his good opinion."

"But, if the authorities make me an Inspector, what will they do for you? You are the person really responsible for discovering these scoundrels."

"Oh, Mr. Winter has as good as offered me work at headquarters already."

Linton reddened with vexation.

"I would have credited him with more sense," he growled. "A girl like you to get mixed up with the sordid affairs which the police have to deal with! Now, had it been that warped genius, Furneaux, I could have understood it. But, a sensible fellow like Winter!"

"Pray, don't be alarmed! I shall not accept any position in the Yard. Yet, if you don't care so much for police duties, why are you a policeman?"

"I cannot help myself. And this sort of thing is a man's job."

"The everlasting distinction of sex. I thought we women had won our proper places in the war?"

"Oh, you did—a thousand times over. You were wonderful, angelic. I cannot understand how any nurse or woman worker in a munition factory remains unmarried. The men at the front, who could judge best of their splendid qualities, were lost in admiration for them."

"Did you lose your heart to a nurse, or a munition-worker?"

He laughed at that.

"No," he admitted. "For one thing, I was not hit. For another, I have never, to my personal knowledge, set eyes on a factory-girl. You, of course, were a flapper in those days."

"Is that an excuse, or a mere drawback?"

"What? About you being a flapper?" He hesitated, and seemed to compel the next words. "It was just an idle comment—a stupid *non sequitur*. Sorry. I mean—"

"I know what *non sequitur* means. 'Followers not allowed' in the kitchen."

"Somehow," he said, looking her straight in the eyes, in a rather troubled way, she thought, "I cannot picture you living in the servants' hall."

"Oh, I don't," she tittered. "I dwell much nearer the attic. But isn't it rather scandalous that we should be talking about ourselves? You ought to be sitting down and thinking hard. You have no idea how I bothered my poor little brain last night after Monica was carried off."

Now, a woman may break away wilfully from a discussion which comes perilously near the border-line of undisguised flirtation, but she is apt to be astonished, if not slightly annoyed, when the man follows suit. Hence, Linton discovered that her sprightliness vanished as soon as he began to analyse the few actual facts of the mysterious incidents which had brought them there that day. So he, in turn, was puzzled and rather distressed. Indeed, each was aware of a diffidence, a drawing apart, which contrasted oddly with the interest each felt in the other only a few minutes earlier. There was a growing tension. They curbed both looks and words. It was almost a relief when the representatives of the C. I. D. returned with four coat-

less and hatless policemen carrying spades and pick-axes.

"Our apologies for the stage wait," cried Furneaux, after the first inquisitive glance. "Everything is in train now, however. In five minutes by the clock Dorking should be roused once more from the sleep of ages!"

CHAPTER VII

“NUMBER 24.”

“SACRE NOM D’UN Nom!” squeaked Furneaux, when the stricken air was still once more, and the last stone or clod of earth had fallen, “there were no half measures about those blighters!”

And, indeed, his excited comment was more than justified by the explosion which Sergeant Linton brought about when he jerked the cord attached to that suspicious wire. The sky seemed to be rended as by some stupendous levin bolt. The earth trembled. Houses shook in Dorking, a mile and a half distant, and windows rattled in Leatherhead, several miles away.

As for dust and smoke, they constituted a noon-day pall which would have screened an army corps, let alone the few people who wished to get away unseen from the near neighbourhood of the tunnel. Linton had warned his companions that it would be well if they stuffed a finger into each ear when he gave the premonitory signal. Of course, few obeyed, and, as a result, they were stunned into momentary silence—all

except Furneaux, who would surely have something to say if he heard the last dread trump of the Archangel proclaiming the Day of Judgment.

But Linton was waving the others away from the direct path to the house, and they knew that he suspected the presence of gas. After a few yards of detour he admitted, however, that he might have been ultra-careful in this respect.

"I thought I knew the smell of most high explosives," he confided to Winter, "but this is a new one on me. It has a peculiarly disintegrating effect, too. I took a peep at the hole, and noticed that the wooden supports and roof of the tunnel were blown to splinters. Those fellows meant to make an end of anyone who disturbed the wire. The mine was planted twenty feet, or more, nearer the exit."

"So, if we happened to escape the full force of the blast we would now be buried alive?" growled the Chief, whose ordinarily cheerful aspect had yielded to a most determined frown. "Very well. There is nothing I like better than a fight to a finish, but I certainly would be grateful to anyone who told me what all the row is about. . . . Now, Miss Mainwaring, sit inside the car. Not feeling bad, I hope?"

"Rather breathless," said Peggy, with quite a valiant smile. "The bang reminded me of a bomb

which fell close to our house during a daylight air raid.”

“It had the same intent,” broke in Furneaux. “Each was a blow meant for the heart of England.”

He spoke so seriously that they all looked at him. Winter seemed to be about to utter some comment, but checked himself.

“I suggest that we defer a detailed examination of the premises until after I have dealt with the press,” he said. “I am at a loss to know what story to give them. The most plausible explanation of the existence of a fortified post in the middle of Surrey is that the place has been a den of coiners or counterfeit note printers, or both.”

“The young men who represent the press nowadays are intelligent above the average,” murmured Furneaux.

“Unfortunately we have to remember that the Chief Commissioner dislikes the broadcasting of sensational yarns by the police,” growled Winter.

“Admitted. But, while avoiding the tuppenny coloured version why not publish the penny plain one?”

“What? Beginning at Box Hill yesterday afternoon?”

“Oh! For goodness’ sake, leave me out of it,” bleated Peggy.

“We’ll do that for everybody’s sake,” said Furneaux

instantly. "Nevertheless, it is hopeless to expect that we can prevent the newspapers from linking the attack on Foster with what has happened here, since some chatty cop must long since have blurted out a few of the striking facts connected with last night's doings. Just consider the position. Three policemen and one of Lord Copmanthorpe's servants are lying dangerously wounded as the outcome of a series of felonies, each obviously connected with the other. Then, the whole countryside has been plunged twice into an uproar by terrific explosions. Look at the Dorking road now! As you would have said when in Artois, Sergeant Linton: —'The cloud of dust rising from the pavé reveals the passage of a large number of vehicles travelling at high speed.' I recommend, Chief, that you leave word at the gate of your intention to keep the appointment made already for noon at Police Headquarters in the town. Then the newspaper men will hurry after you, and, meanwhile, you have time to consider how far you can go in the way of hints as to the truth. The sooner we get Lord Copmanthorpe's name into this inquiry the better."

"But, why?" demanded Peggy, and her tone was so imperious that it surprised Linton.

"Because we ought to scare Cabinet Ministers and others in high places to take all necessary precautions

for their own safety,” came the prompt reply. “If the Government can be persuaded that a really dangerous conspiracy against the State is in active existence the less difficulty we, the guardians of law and order, shall have in devising and carrying out defensive measures. We are handicapped heavily enough, as matters stand. It is a fixed principle of the British Constitution that the police may be shot, stabbed, blown up, bludgeoned, or otherwise destroyed by enterprising criminals at all convenient times and places, but woe betide the unhappy detective or constable who shoots first. There is hardly a coroner in the land who is not eager to commit him for trial on a charge of wilful murder.”

“Quite true,” said Winter grimly. “And here comes the first newspaper car. . . . Sit well back, Miss Mainwaring. Let no one see you clearly.”

By this time they were at the gate. Winter himself assured the first flight of journalists that there would be no more sensational occurrences at the Avenue House, which, according to a resident in the locality, was the accepted name of the place. With much difficulty, owing to the congested traffic, they passed slowly along the Dorking road. Near the Burford Bridge Hotel they were stopped by a police cyclist patrol,

who informed them that a foreigner on a bicycle had been taken to Headquarters.

"Did he say anything—make any protest?" inquired Winter.

"Yes, sir," answered the policeman. "He raised a regular row, making out that he was going into the town to telephone for seats at a theatre."

"Did he tell you where he lives?"

"At the house over there, sir," and the man pointed to a residence on the west side of the valley, whereas Avenue House stood on the eastern slope. "As a matter of fact, we spotted him riding down to the road, so were ready for business when he came bowling along."

"Capital! Let the reporters pass, but keep a sharp eye on others until the time is up. If anyone tries to bluff you be sure and bring him or her along."

Linton, of course, was deeply interested in the words and actions of the two detectives. Hitherto, with few exceptions, he had regarded their utterances as verging on the fantastic, but now he was beginning to doubt his own sagacity. He would never have dared to alarm half a dozen parishes so thoroughly by blowing up the mine; if, as a direct consequence, some accomplice of the actual criminals fell into one or both of the police traps on the high road, he would give blind

obedience in future to these queer representatives of the C. I. D.

“There’s our catch!” exclaimed Winter, as the car slowed up on approaching the Police Headquarters. Two motor-bicycles and an ordinary pedal machine were balanced against the kerb. One constable remained with them and his right hand rested unobtrusively in a pocket. The other was shepherding a stockily built little fellow into the police station.

“Ever seen him before?” said the Chief, turning suddenly on Linton.

“No, sir—not to my knowledge,” was the ready answer.

“Tell that cyclist constable not to give any attention to the man if he comes out again. Take Miss Mainwaring to Superintendent MacDermott’s house, and leave her there. Then return here, watch Mr. Furneaux from a distance, and be ready to help him if required.”

As neither of the detectives had said a word bearing on any new project the younger man was puzzled, but his training had taught him to carry out definite orders without question. Peggy, of course, acknowledged no such silent acceptance of the incomprehensible.

“What’s going to happen now?” she said, in a half

whisper, as her escort led her a little higher up the street. Linton laughed.

"I've got to watch Furneaux," he said. "That should be quite exciting in itself."

"But, please why shouldn't I watch Furneaux, too?"

"Because the O. C. says you're to make the acquaintance of Mrs. MacDermott, who is a dear, motherly old soul. Have no fear, Miss Mainwaring! You will hear everything at luncheon, if not sooner."

Linton himself began to have an inkling of coming events when Furneaux wanted to know where the telephone exchange was situated. Meanwhile, Mr. Winter had met Superintendent MacDermott, and the prisoner, who might be better described by the French word, *détenu*, was brought into MacDermott's private office.

"Who are you?" began the Chief, with an agreeable smile.

The man, evidently striving to cloak his alarm under an air of truculence, seemed to mistrust this friendly reception.

"Why am I make-a ze arrest, in ze street, so?" he said, his gruffness probably concealing agitation.

"You are not arrested. You have simply been asked to come here and explain why you were hurrying to the telephone?"

"I go London dissa evenin', yes, an' I tell my Margharita, vat you say, my girl, go getta two seat at de theatro, an' one dam polisman pull-a me offa my bicycle. What-a for?"

"I'm sure we are very sorry to have troubled you. But you have not yet told me your name?"

"Pietro Ruffini."

"Ah. And what is your occupation?"

"I work in ze garden for Mistaire Thistleton."

"At Holly Lodge," put in MacDermott.

"Yes—sare."

"Italian?" said Winter suavely.

"Si. Genova."

"And how long have you been in Mr. Thistleton's service?"

"Seex month."

"Well, I must apologise for a mistake. We are all liable to that, you know. I suppose you know nothing about the people who lived in Avenue House?"

"No, sare."

"Very good. You may go. We have not kept you many minutes from the telephone."

Ruffini looked rather bewildered, but hurried out at once. MacDermott, though perplexed for the moment, merely remarked that the fool might have saved himself some trouble by using Mr. Thistleton's 'phone.

"I guessed as much," grinned Winter. "It's all right. He's just the sort of sulky idiot who believes the British police can be humbugged easily, as he knows from past experience that he would have been handled quite differently in Italy. Now, you and I are going to interview the press. I think the story ought to begin in Curzon-street at ten o'clock last night, while the discovery of Monica Jackson's presence in Avenue House soon after eleven arose from the fact that the inmates were under observation already owing to certain suspicious circumstances which cannot be gone into at the moment. Not a syllable about the half-crown, Linton, or Miss Mainwaring. We account for the attack on Monica by our belief that a gang of international criminals is trying to bring about a social and political upheaval in England, and abducted a member of Lord Copmanthorpe's household so that they might obtain information as to his lordship's movements during the next few days. Law-breakers are always interested in the Home Secretary. But, first of all, what have you learnt of 'mon vieux' and his associates?"

"The house agent says that a Frenchman, Monsieur Jules Lefévre, bought Avenue House nine months ago, posing as an enthusiastic amateur gardener. He paid cash for the place, £4,000 in Bank of England notes; therefore, his references were never taken up. I have

them here, and they seem to be first-rate, a bank and a firm of stock-brokers.”

“We must let the reporters have the names.”

“Yes. The publicity will draw either explanation or denial. The only letters ever delivered there were gas and electricity accounts, and demands for the rates, which were paid in cash by a housekeeper, who also did the marketing. The telephone was cut off, at Monsieur Lefévre’s request.”

“Ah.”

“Yes. That struck me as peculiar. But, of course, one sees now that the occupants were afraid of someone listening in.”

“One word, and then we must face the reporters. You’re an old hand at the game, Mac. Have you formed any sort of theory, no matter how far-fetched it may sound, which will account for these extraordinary doings?”

“I have never been so much at sea in all my years of police work,” admitted MacDermott ruefully. “The ruin has not been entered, as I am aware of Furneaux’s little fads in such matters, but I did peep in from the hall. The stairs have gone. In a big space beneath, where there may have been cellars, I saw some remnants of glass testing tubes and fused copper fittings. If such a thing were feasible, I would have suspected

that the place had been used for distilling spirit."

"And why not?"

The older man smiled.

"You know better than I that the precautions against discovery were too elaborate and deadly for that simple explanation," he said.

"Yet it all depends on the sort of hell-brew they were concocting," mused Winter aloud. "I suppose there are factories in Germany today where a peeping stranger would meet with short shrift. . . . Well, now for the newspapers and a national uproar!"

Knowing his men, Winter arranged to meet the journalists again at three o'clock on the scene of operations. The evening papers were selling already in the streets of London and other towns with big headlines and small paragraphs describing the second explosion, and connecting it with prior events. Later editions would carry a fairly complete story. The morning newspapers would demand photographs, plus a midnight telephonic inquiry as to developments, if any, before going to press. He trusted to luck and the confusion of the past half hour that no local correspondent had heard as yet of the arrest of Pietro Ruffini. Therein his hope was justified. He had to answer many questions, but none as to the reason why a local Italian gardener should be suspected because he wished to take some

unknown Margharita to a London theatre that night.

MacDermott, well versed in the peculiar ways of his friends from the “Yard,” was by no means as surprised as he would have been otherwise when at the conclusion of the conference with the newspaper men he found in his office a stubborn and vicious-eyed Ruffini. The man’s hands were handcuffed behind his back. His face was bruised, and one eye was closing rapidly, not to open properly again for many days.

“Ah!” cried Winter cheerfully, “you fought, did you, my Italian friend?”

“The people in the telephone exchange saw something worth while,” grinned Furneaux. “It was a hefty scrap, short but lively. Linton has gone to change his clothes, as his coat was badly torn, but he reports no other damages. I must say he tackles superbly. Must have played Rugger in his time.”

“Anything urgent?”

“Well, yes. It all depends on whether Superintendent MacDermott decides to charge Signor Ruffini with complicity in the attempts to murder already committed, or allows him to give away his associates.”

“Nevaire!” shouted the prisoner savagely. He could have bitten his tongue when he saw the detectives and MacDermott grin broadly.

“Just so!” chortled Furneaux. “Five minutes ago

you were protesting that you did not understand why you should have been arrested twice, though you fought hard enough the second time when you realised you had been tricked. . . . You see," he went on, pretending to ignore his victim, "this imbecile made straight for the telephone office when released, and asked for a telephone number in Soho. Naturally, there was a little delay, as the local people had to be assured by authority that a complete stranger, who 'didn't look a bit like a policeman', as one of the girls put it, should be allowed to listen in. As a matter of fact, I myself put the call through. I tried to get the inspector at Vine-street on the job, but Pietro was becoming restive, so I had to take a chance and give him his number. I believe, but am not sure until inquiry is made, that a woman answering to the name of Margharita Dubois was waiting in some Soho restaurant for this call, and vanished at once after being summoned to the instrument. She gave her name when Pietro inquired, and he said, in Italian:—'Eleven-fifteen. Evidently quite successful. Three men and a woman, who came in a car, and four others, who seemed to be policemen'. . . . Why did you think they were policemen, Pietro?"

The question was shot at the prisoner so suddenly that he started, but recovered his wits quickly, and snarled an oath.

“The lady was fully satisfied with this information, and hung up,” continued Furneaux. “As to what occurred during the next twenty seconds, Sergeant Linton will now enlighten us, as I hear his step.”

There was a knock on the door, Superintendent MacDermott shouted “Come in!”, and Linton entered. Furneaux had brought off one of the minor effects in which his soul delighted. MacDermott affected indifference, but the station-sergeant, a burly fellow who had mounted guard over the Italian, looked flabbergasted. Neither they, nor even Winter, it must be confessed, had heard anyone approaching. Indeed, they could hardly have been certain of the newcomer’s identity had they been on the *qui vive* for his appearing.

“Tell the present company what happened after Ruffini came out from the telephone booth,” said Furneaux, addressing Linton as though the latter had heard the whole conversation.

Linton, whose respect for the little man had grown by leaps and bounds since the discovery of the mine and its striking results, was ready now for any oddity of word or action emanating from one whom he regarded as a veritable genius. He had changed into a blue serge suit, and Winter noticed, with approval, that he had selected a tie which matched it.

“I was looking in at the door,” he said instantly,

"and caught your signal, so closed with Ruffini at once."

"Without speaking?" put in Winter.

"Yes, sir. It was advisable. When we got him down we took an automatic from his breast pocket and a dagger from his belt."

"We?"

"Mr. Furneaux assisted me splendidly."

"How?"

"By grabbing his ankles, and lifting his feet in the air. That put him completely out of action."

"A trifle, but mine own," chirped Furneaux.

"Did he resist?" went on Winter.

"Well, yes. He tore both my coat and waistcoat."

"Did you hit him?"

"No. He—er—acquired that black eye by having his face jammed against the floor."

"Capital. Sorry I missed the turn. How much did Dorking see of it?"

"Nothing. I closed the door as I entered, and the telephone attendants have promised to keep mum. Mr. Furneaux and I linked arms with him as we came here, and I don't think anyone noticed us."

Winter eyed Ruffini reflectively for a few seconds. He was convinced that even if such a rascal offered to betray the gang to which he belonged he could not

be trusted. The man's calculating look was eloquent. He was planning already to befool the police

“Put him in a cell,” said the Chief to the station sergeant. “If you approve, Mr. MacDermott, let him be charged, for the time being, with intent to commit a felony and carrying concealed weapons. You can deal with him later for other offences.”

“Before he goes, however,” said Furneaux, “he may as well know that we understand exactly what a half-crown marked No. 24 in Roman numerals means.”

That Parthian shot told. The Italian's swarthy face paled. Nevertheless, an iron resolution, or, it may be, a greater fear than any engendered by the law, kept his tongue still. So he was taken off.

Linton darted a quick look at Furneaux when the latter spoke of the marks on a half-crown which had presumably been found on the prisoner when his pockets were searched thoroughly in the charge room.

“Yes,” said the Little 'Un at once. “You were right in guessing that those marks represented a number. Miss Mainwaring supplied us with No. 4 yesterday at Box Hill. This fellow possessed No. 24. We have another joker in Bow-street who was entrusted with No. 57. Quite a large organisation, it would appear.”

A constable knocked, and entered.

“A gentleman outside, who says he is Lord Robert

Ferris, wants to see Miss Mainwaring, sir," he said to MacDermott.

"Lord Robert Ferris! Is he a Guards Officer?" cried Linton involuntarily.

"Yes. Do you know him?" snapped Furneaux.

"Quite well."

"Then don't meet him, just yet. I'll soon settle his hash," and he darted out instantly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PACK IN FULL CRY

“WHY should Mr. Furneaux want to settle Bobby Ferris’s hash?” said Linton, looking at Winter in genuine amazement.

“If I were to hazard a guess,” said the Chief, affecting a ponderous style of speech which gave him time to think, “it would be that his lordship is a friend of the Copmanthorpes, who are naturally anxious to know why various members of their household should be in such request in the neighbourhood of Dorking. At present, however, in so far as our worst suspicions go, we wish to keep Cabinet Ministers as much in the dark as the general public.”

“But Ferris and I are old friends, and I can put things right with him in a minute.”

“I rather believe that Mr. Furneaux is now mystifying Lord Robert still further,” and Winter’s dry tone revealed more than the mere words. “I make it a rule not to interfere when he acts so decisively. He always has a reason, and it is generally a sound one. What is bothering me at the moment is not Lord Robert Ferris’s unexpected presence, but why Pietro Ruffini should

deem it necessary to carry a pistol and dagger when he cycles into Dorking on an apparently innocent errand. Who and what is Mr. Thistleton, MacDermott?"

"A highly respected resident in the district," said the Superintendent. "He is what is known as a bankers' stockbroker. I would as soon suspect an archbishop of complicity in this affair as an elderly City man of his type."

"Will you send an intelligent constable to Mr. Thistleton's house to explain that Ruffini is under arrest, and that the police want to receive and answer any telephonic inquiry which may be made for him there during this afternoon and evening? Of course, your man should remain on duty until, say, ten o'clock, and make a careful record if anything turns up, including telegrams and letters. Are your local magistrates to be trusted? Will they remand Ruffini for a week in custody without seeking too candid an explanation?"

"They are models of discretion," laughed MacDermott.

"Well—it may be an empty dream—but didn't someone hint about luncheon being ready?"

"It's on the table."

But the telephone intervened. It was Mr. Sheldon,

speaking from Scotland Yard. Furneaux had not erred when he assumed that Margharita Dubois had sped quickly from the Soho restaurant after hearing from Ruffini. Neither the proprietor nor any of the waiters had ever set eyes on her before. They regarded her as an ordinary customer who had made an appointment with a friend for a meal in their establishment. He (Sheldon) did not look for a reply from Paris for another hour, at least.

"That's all right," said the Chief. "You go and eat now, which is what I intend doing. I shall be in the Yard about five o'clock. Have four of our Continental squad ready for a conference. Shelve everything else. This affair is of the highest importance. Tell Sir Arthur I'll be glad if he, too, can arrange to be free then for an hour."

This reference to the Chief Commissioner showed how serious was Winter's view of matters. Evidently, he was determined that the resources of the Criminal Investigation Department should be placed at his disposal without stint or reserve.

In the flurry of the moment Mr. MacDermott forgot to invite Linton to join the luncheon-party, so the latter, scrupulous in the observation of discipline, was left in the room when the others went out. Undecided whether or not to go at once to his own quarters for a

hasty meal, he looked through a window into the street, and was far more annoyed than he cared to confess even to his inner consciousness at seeing Miss Margaret Mainwaring being escorted by Furneaux from the private door of Mr. MacDermott's house to a limousine drawn up behind the detectives' car.

Ferris, whom of course, he recognised instantly, seemed to be surprised by the haste with which the girl and he himself were hustled into the vehicle, which set off at once down the London road. Furneaux looked after them, and grinned. Then, since those beady eyes missed nothing, he caught sight of Linton's frowning stare above the wire blind of the Superintendent's office window. His expression changed into one of deep concern. He said, quite plainly, without uttering a word:

"Well, well! What's gone wrong now?"

In half a minute he was back in the room.

"Why are you alone?" he cried.

"Mr. MacDermott has taken Mr. Winter to lunch, but—"

"He meant to ask you, of course. Took it for granted you would come."

"Possibly. But—"

"That ass, Ferris, couldn't leave well enough alone. He insisted on escorting Miss Mainwaring back to London, so a very angry young lady had to go with

him. If it is any consolation, you may be sure that at this moment Miss Mainwaring regards Lord Robert Ferris with a dislike almost amounting to aversion."

Linton was beginning to feel wary of Furneaux's conversational openings. He tried to laugh.

"That will be a new sensation for Bobby, who is a bit of a dog with the fair sex," he said. "However, I am mainly concerned about Miss Mainwaring. She was certainly looking forward to hearing a fresh budget of news during luncheon."

"She won't have to wait long," came the careless comment. "She has promised to dine with you and me at eight. Ah, here comes MacDermott to inquire what the devil is detaining us."

And, indeed, the worthy Superintendent did arrive by the private passage leading from his residence.

"What the devil is detaining you fellows?" he inquired. Linton had to bite his lower lip hard to choke back a laugh, but Furneaux only muttered that there must be something radically wrong with the whole tribe of common or garden dukes, as their sons were often such frightful asses. At any rate, Linton thought fit not to seek more precise information about that wholly unexpected fixture for the evening. He had yet to learn that the Yard required his presence in London for an indefinite period.

The all-absorbing topic of the hour was dropped completely during the meal. A casual reference told Linton that Miss Mainwaring had been allowed only a peep at Monica, who was ready to relapse into pronounced hysteria if her nerves were not soothed by frequent doses of bromide. After that, the talk between MacDermott and the detective dealt largely with past experiences. For instance, it was instructive for a novice in criminology to learn that a highly expert and most daring burglar, who had been run to earth in the Dorking district some years before the war, narrowly escaped being shot for abject cowardice in the front line. He was saved by a sensible medical board, which certified that he was suffering from some abnormal form of neurasthenia. Drafted into a naval dockyard, he picked up some real knowledge of under-sea sound detectors, suggested a remarkably ingenious improvement in those quite technical and novel devices, and cheerfully spent the remainder of his war service in a destroyer listening for enemy submarines, than which few more nerve-racking occupations can be named.

"It's odd," put in MacDermott, "but we used his jemmy to break open that window last night."

"He is now an excellent locksmith, and much valued by his employers, a firm of safe manufacturers," said

Winter. "I saw him the other day, and he told me he had applied for a job on the new mystery ship, but I dissuaded him from taking it if offered, as he is over fifty, and ought to settle down into staid citizenship."

"Oh, was *that* it?" snapped Furneaux. Winter almost blushed. He tried to concentrate on the proper dissection of a chicken's leg, but could not ignore the wrath in his colleague's eyes.

"Yes," he said. "I'll admit it now. You remember the theft of Lady Burgand's jewels, Mac—how a specially devised lock was picked and the safe locked again, just as if someone had the key and knew the combination. Well, I spoke of the affair to our friend, and he, in genuine admiration, blurted out the remark that he thought there were only two men living who could open that lock by listening to the tumbling of the wards. He, of course, was one. I guessed at the other, and, by jing, we got him with the goods."

"And for a whole week you crowded over me because you had pulled off what you chose to describe as a perfect example of inductive reasoning," complained Furneaux bitterly.

"Well, well, Frog, I meant to tell you sometime. I know you hate anyone to encroach on your own special method of first finding out what happened and then

pretending you had sensed the whole thing from the beginning."

"You're a comical pair," laughed MacDermott. "It beats me how you've survived a series of stolid Chief Commissioners. The average County Chief Constable would die of apoplexy if his detective department conducted police inquiries in your amazing way. As a case in point, I literally wouldn't have dared to blow up that tunnel this morning. I heard the crack, and imagined you had all gone to glory."

"We escaped by a miracle," said Winter.

MacDermott took thought. He remembered now that the Chief of the C.I.D. had glossed over the exact cause of the second explosion in his statement to the press. In fact, Winter was not at all sure what, if any, casualties had resulted. Linton kept his eyes glued on his section of a fowl. He reflected that things might not always be what they seem, even in the archives of Scotland Yard.

He was asked to pack a bag with sufficient equipment for a week, and, while he was gone, MacDermott was enlightened as to the identity of Miss Mainwaring. He opened his eyes widely at this discovery, but Winter, who told him, insisted on the necessity of absolute reticence on that particular point.

"You see," he said, "if once the social position of

one of the two girls who met ‘*mon vieux*’ and his fellow-scoundrel outside the King’s Head at Box Hill becomes public property, this affair attains an undesirable notoriety. Even our young friend, Linton, doesn’t know yet that she is other than a superior housemaid in Curzon-street.”

“Does she know anything about him?” asked MacDermott.

“I think not. We have kept strictly to business.”

“He’s a sharp fellow. I wonder he hasn’t looked up Lord Copmanthorpe in ‘Who’s Who’ or ‘Debrett.’ ”

“Have you?” put in Furneaux.

“A fair hit. But I have been too busy.”

“At present, we want to avoid complications,” went on Furneaux. “Captain Linton dare not flirt with a housemaid, no matter how pretty she may be, and the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring cannot possibly look soulfully into the eyes of a police sergeant.”

“Inspector, now,” announced MacDermott. “He is in orders today—specially promoted.”

“Have you told him?” inquired Winter.

“Not yet.”

“Well, break the glad tidings when we’re in the car. It’s high time we were moving.”

MacDermott thought he was scoring rather neatly when he said to Linton a few minutes later:

"By the way, Inspector, when the opportunity offers you might send your uniform into store. Our outfitters have your measurements, and will have your new clothes ready within a few days."

"Have I been given a step then, sir?" said Linton quietly. "If so, I have you to thank for it, and I am exceedingly obliged to you."

"You are also recommended for the Merit Badge," went on the older man. "Possibly, that doesn't sound much in your ears, but the ordinary police constable thinks a lot of it, as he knows it has to be earned by real good work."

"I am beginning to realise that side of life in the police," was the modest answer. "A soldier has to take chances in war, which, until the past few years, might never come his way at all. But the average policeman may be called on to risk his life at any moment of his thirty years of service, and he never can count on the odds he has to face. I assure you, no matter what the future may have in store for me personally, I shall always look back on my experiences here with a lively gratitude to my comrades. They are splendid fellows, every man of them."

"Don't forget to give full play to those admirable sentiments when you're a Chief Constable," chirped Furneaux.

Acting on instructions, Linton effaced himself during the press inspection of Avenue House, and took care not to figure in any of the photographs for publication. He noticed that Furneaux paid slight heed to the charred chaos within the four walls, but prowled about the out-buildings, and examined every inch of the Ford car standing in the garage, which, as a building, though badly scorched by heat and shaken by air concussion, was fairly intact in other respects.

The reporters, naturally, were mainly interested in the ruined house and the exciting story told by Mac-Dermott. They were gathered round him and Winter on the lawn when Furneaux crooked a finger at Linton, and led him to the garage.

“Do you understand the mechanism of the internal combustion engine?” he almost whispered, when the two were inside the shed.

“Yes.”

“Well, have a peep at the transmission gear. There’s a candle. I suppose it is safe enough. Anyhow, I’ve taken a chance with it already. Don’t touch a thing. Just look. The inspection pit is quite roomy —big enough for a much larger car, in fact—so you need not soil your clothes.”

Linton obeyed without another word. He had been in the pit only a few seconds when he whistled softly,

and thrust head and shoulders higher within the framework of the chassis.

"Can you hear?" he said in a curiously muffled voice. His position, plus the unusual acoustic properties of a sunken rectangle, affected his ordinarily clear and incisive utterance.

"Perfectly," replied Furneaux.

"There is a thing like a bomb here, adjusted in such a way that any movement of the differential will upset it."

"So I thought. How could it be detonated?"

"Almost certainly by being turned on to its side, and then set off either by a weighted striker or, more probably, by the action of some corrosive acid liberated from a tube, as the latter method would be nearly infallible."

"Is there much risk in removing it?"

"None, I think. Someone had to fix it, you know. There's a perch actually provided. . . . Anyhow—" and the hollow voice ceased for a couple of seconds—"here it is!"

Furneaux, bending, with hands on knees, saw the younger man stooping on the floor of the pit, and holding in his right hand a sinister-looking object, fashioned of dull-coloured metal, globular in shape, but slightly flattened at the south pole to form a base, and with a screw cap at the north pole.

"Shall I draw the string?" inquired Linton coolly.

"If you can do so without killing the pair of us."

"Oh, yes. I can promise that. The infernal thing had to be put in order, and the reverse action should be safe enough. But—"

"You want me to hold the candle. Give it to me."

Now, both men knew that Linton was not going to mention the candle, which he could have set on a shelf in the pit. He was about to suggest that Furneaux might go outside until called back.

"Really—" he began.

"Winter will be both surprised and distressed if both of us are blown to smithereens," cackled Furneaux, "but, whatever I might have done a minute ago, I certainly must hold that candle now."

Linton made no further protest. While his companion showed a light he unscrewed the metal cap and lifted it out carefully. Attached to it by thin wire was a half-inch cylinder of glass, three parts filled with a brown liquid.

"There you are," cried Linton gleefully. "That's a corrosive sublimate which, when spilled on the chemical compound forming its opposite number, sets up sufficient heat to affect the detonator. Nearly all the high explosives have to be detonated by fulminate of mercury."

"Pass 'em up separately," said Furneaux, "and take another squint at the machinery. Those babies left nothing to chance, and may have provided a second little joker in case the first one failed."

After further examination, Linton reported all clear, and, in the bright light of a window, the two scrutinised the bomb more closely. It was a well-made article. The glass tube had fitted loosely into a cylindrical chamber penetrating nearly one-third of the missile's diameter. It had been surrounded by some whitish-grey crystals, which now lay at the bottom.

"If you have an envelope in your pocket we'll shake those boys out," said Linton. "I believe this bit of frightfulness is of the incendiary variety, and I am not familiar with the actual method of construction."

Furneaux considered.

"Will there be any danger, then, in taking it with us to town?"

"I believe not."

"Quite sure?"

"No. I can't vouch for it. You see for yourself how it works, but I cannot be certain that concussion brought about by an accidental fall might not do the trick."

"Well, here is the envelope for your crystals. Then we'll contrive the accidental fall. If possible, I want

the whole apparatus to be in the hands of the Home Office experts tonight."

Furneaux wasted no time over such matters. It was easy to arrange a loose plank so that the bomb should roll into the pit when the plank was moved, and, if an explosion followed, it could hardly injure persons cowering outside the shed. The heavy cylinder dropped with a thud; hence, of course, there were no ill results.

"And now," said Linton, "all we want is a cork for the glass tube."

"Oh, you'll find that in the cupboard where the chauffeur keeps his sparking plugs and other small accessories. I didn't like either its smell or appearance, and wondered what had become of the bottle it fitted. That is one reason why I searched so carefully."

A piece of sacking concealed the bomb from other eyes when Linton carried it to the car and placed it beneath a seat. By now the photographers were busy, and MacDermott was giving instructions to the police guard. It was evident that neither Winter nor Furneaux would attempt any detailed scrutiny of the débris until it had been sifted by workmen. Indeed, the local officials undertook to note the place where each recognisable scrap of metal was found, a task ren-

dered easy by the fact that a builder in the locality had made certain alterations in the cellars to the order of "Monsieur Lefévre," it being understood that the benevolent scientist in question wanted to experiment in flower and fruit culture by artificial light and heat.

The Chief knew nothing of the latest infernal machine until the car was running swiftly along the London road. Then Furneaux told him where it was reposing. Winter had cut the end off a fresh Havana, and was about to apply a match, which, however, he blew out.

"What sort of bomb is it?" he inquired, in a smoothly mellifluous tone which his colleague understood and was delighted at. "I mean, is it fired by a fuse or contact?"

"Neither. Inspector Linton tells me it is of a variety which bursts by merely rolling over—on the lines of a certain type of chemical fire extinguisher."

Winter struck another match, and lighted the cigar.

"I hope you are sitting on it," he said.

"You must learn to control your face," snapped Furneaux at Linton. "You defeat my best efforts when you start grinning like a Cheshire cat."

"Suppose you tell me what really happened," said

Winter, whereupon the little man cackled shrilly.

"Am I an inspired idiot?" he demanded. "Am I the champion humbug of all the ages? We are not dealing with criminals, but with lunatics. This fellow—Lefévre, shall we call him?—is not a crook but a scientific crank, a monomaniac driven out of his senses by a bright vision of some Utopian State which he alone is destined to establish. When, if ever, we corner him, he will rail at us as the minions of an effete and tyrannical political system. In his eyes we are a pest of green flies eating into the heart of the socialistic rose, and must be removed by the drastic means beloved of gardeners. Do you think he was joking when he spoke to that builder of growing flowers and fruit by artificial light and heat? Not he! The trope was a serious figure of speech. He means to destroy that he may re-create. The Phoenix of his dreams shall rise beautiful and flawless from our ashes. I tell you now that Monsieur Jules Lefévre is the most dangerous and highly developed force existing today in any separate corporeal entity. We must look for him among the great ones, the thinkers. He simply cannot have reached eminence without leaving a blazed trail of successful achievement. If, tonight, there were held simultaneously gatherings of the most notable gaol-

birds of Europe and America and the men most distinguished in scientific research, I would expect to find him among the latter, *primus inter pares.*"

"Hobnobbing with the President of the British Association, and discussing the vagaries of stellar light with the Astronomer Royal, in fact?"

"Yes. I mean that very thing."

"He has peculiar friends—Pietro Ruffini, for instance, an Italian ruffian, with pistol and dagger, all complete."

"And a gardener. A mere implement in the new weeding and tilling of humanity."

"P'raps you're right. In any case, I'll follow the worms, such as Ruffini and his like, while you lurk in the library and smoking-room of the Royal Society."

Linton listened to this remarkable discussion without daring to take part in it. Were it not for the accumulated proofs of the professional acumen of these two strangely constituted detectives, he might have thought they were raving. As it was, he tried to follow their lines of reasoning. His expression was so grave that Winter smiled broadly.

"Well, young man," he said, "what do you think of us now?"

"I think," came the prompt answer, "I think you are right."

"Which of us?"

"Both."

CHAPTER IX

A CONCLAVE—AND A DINNER

THE Commissioner of Police, Sir Arthur Monson, made it convenient to attend the conference summoned by Mr. Winter. It was the height of the Season, and he had a rather pressing social engagement, but that went by the board, since, strange to relate, Chief Commissioners can be just as interested in their duties as the youngest detective in the C.I.D.

Nine men gathered in Mr. Winter's office, a room on the third floor of New Scotland Yard. Its two windows gave a fine view of the Thames, backed by the concave front of the London County Council offices, with Westminster Bridge and St. Thomas's Hospital on the right, and, as though some utilitarian imp wished to spoil a beautiful picture, the gaunt ugliness of Hungerford Bridge on the left.

But the far-flung vista of South London revealed by the rays of the setting sun did not draw the glance of any man in that company. Sir Arthur, who had obtained from Inspector Sheldon a fairly comprehensive sketch of the incidents already recorded, greeted Winter and Furneaux with genuine friendliness. He

shook hands with Linton, saying that he had met his father, the General, and was well-acquainted with Colonel Hollies, his mother's brother, and Chief Constable of the county of which, it was expected, Linton himself would take charge within less than a year as head of the police. He nodded affably to the four members of the Continental squad. Sheldon came in with him. Soon they were all seated around a large office desk. Mr. Winter occupied his accustomed chair, and the Commissioner sat next to him. The others arranged themselves in no particular order.

Winter plunged into the case without preamble. For the benefit of the new men who would assist him henceforth in this special investigation he reviewed all its circumstances from the outset. His exposition was listened to by an intent audience. Sir Arthur lifted inquiring eyebrows when Miss Margaret Mainwaring's name was mentioned in connection with Lord Copmanthorpe's London residence, but a long familiarity with the methods of his two most trusted *aides* kept him from breaking in with the obvious question.

Winter's statement occupied fully half an hour. It was given without notes, and with a lucidity which would have won the commendation of a King's Bench judge. Not a fact was omitted nor a name forgotten. Linton, who had been minded not so long since to cavil

at the curiously airy and detached methods adopted by both Winter and Furneaux, realised at last that the Chief was a man of really great intellectual power, while his eccentric subordinate was endowed with an intuition which would be uncanny if it were not the outcome of genius governed by long experience.

Photographs of half-crowns Nos. 4 and 57 were handed around. The marks on the latter seemed to have been made by the instrument used to deface the coin which Peggy Mainwaring discovered. There was the same brutal intent in the direction of the cuts. On comparing the two the significance of the numerals became self-evident.

The Commissioner held both photographs side by side in a strong light.

"Sometimes," he said, "I find myself fighting against Mr. Furneaux's psychological theories, but one has to admit a sense of horror, a sort of mesmeric fascination, in these 'tokens.' The mere use of such a word for such a symbol is adroit. And, if fifty-seven have been issued, we have to deal with a widespread organisation. . . . What can I do to help, Mr. Winter?"

"I need not ask for your support, sir, since you regard this matter so seriously, but I shall be glad if you will see the Permanent Under Secretary at the Home Office

tomorrow, and convince him of the extent and significance of this new menace."

"What exactly is the danger you fear?"

"It is twofold. There is a secret movement against the national life, as we know it, and I am looking, at any moment, for a direct attack on ministers of the Crown, if not on the Crown itself."

"Of course, you will be given all the assistance you need. I think that those now present should devote themselves exclusively to the running down of this gang, and especially of its leader. I must relieve you of other anxieties. You need not be concerned as to the safety of the members of the Royal Family or the Cabinet. Our special preventive measures will be adopted at once. . . . Mr. Furneaux, this should be a chase after your own heart."

"It appeals, sir, it appeals," agreed Furneaux. "It has novel features. Twice, this morning, we narrowly escaped being blown to Kingdom Come. Inspector Linton has had three chances, not to mention the poison gas and Ruffini's revolver. Such incidental episodes elevate sordid crime into Greek tragedy."

The Commissioner did not avail himself of this opening into the realms of the higher criticism.

"Certain aspects of the affair strike me as peculiar," he went on. "For instance, assuming you are right as

to Monica Jackson being terrorised by a snake, are we to believe that Lefévre actually kept a snake in readiness for just such a purpose?"

"Mr. Winter and I have discussed that point. We are prepared to find that a snake was purchased from some naturalist's shop about seven or eight o'clock last evening."

"That is an excellent line. . . . And, then, the bomb in the car. Do you regard that as a precaution taken regularly each night?"

"It must have been so. MacDermott is sure that no one could have slipped out to the garage, adjusted the bomb, and got back again to the house before the poison gas, high explosive and fire rendered retreat to the tunnel impossible."

The Chief's telephone rang, and everyone except Linton knew that the call probably concerned the business in hand, since the operator would put none other through unless the matter were vitally important. It was the Prefecture of Police in Paris speaking. Inquiry at the Maison Marnier, Rue Blanche, had revealed that the lady's costume, No. 17,008, had been sold out of the window as a stock model. Therefore, the name of the buyer was unknown, the transaction being for cash. But, as it happened, the shop assistant who made the sale remembered the woman quite well, and was

sure she could recognise her again, because certain alterations were necessary, and madame carried a peculiar mark on her left shoulder-blade—a queer mark—the Prefecture had forgotten the English phrase, and Winter did not understand the French one.

“*Un moment, s'il vous plaît!*” he said, covering the receiver with his hand, “What in the world is ‘*un signe croissant*’?”

“A crescent-shaped mole,” said Furneaux.

Then the Chief had to enlighten Paris, and reddened under the consciousness that all ears were alert to check his explanatory French. Nevertheless, he emerged triumphantly from the ordeal.

“The dress was purchased last November,” he told the others when the call was ended. “The Prefecture believes that the name Jules Lefévre is an assumed one, being that of a famous French painter, though minus the letter ‘b.’ A notorious German agent, named Erminia Schwartz, has a mark which corresponds with that on the shoulder of the purchaser of the dress. If ours is the same woman, Paris wants her badly. . . . Evidently, you gave them some details, Sheldon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Quite right. They offer help, and will be glad to examine a few of the pills we found on that fellow now in Bow-street. Is the analysis in yet?”

"It reached us this afternoon. But it is only a preliminary report. The Home Office laboratory regards it as a new preparation, mostly synthetic, and certain rather uncommon experimental tests must be made before the constituents can be stated accurately. They believe they possess already certain information which fits in with this case."

The Commissioner rose with a smile.

"This must be the new war which everyone is talking about," he said. "All that is lacking in the enemy's equipment is an airship and a few fast 'planes. I think we ought to endeavour to meet daily at ten and five. I want to keep in personal touch with this business."

During the next hour Linton, a novice in all that concerned the work of the Criminal Investigation Department, was initiated into its remarkably businesslike system. He heard men voicing their real knowledge of the international underworld—its leaders, their ways, their dupes, and their meeting places. He was astounded by some of the names mentioned—those of people whom he had regarded hitherto as amiable fadists, and by no means likely to be the associates of dangerous degenerates—while the famous hotels, night clubs and cafés which one set or another used as common ground for their attack on social order were so numerous that the mere recital took his breath away.

The telephone—often two instruments at once—was busy enough now. Instructions were given to divisional headquarters, and arrangements made to round up or shadow certain suspects, or for local detectives to accompany men from the Yard to some noted rendezvous at a fixed hour, on the ground that “Maréchal and Corsini play chess there every night at nine,” or “Ruby Montagu is dancing instructress there,” or “the Doctor seldom shows up till half-past ten.”

Furneaux broke in when the “Doctor” was spoken of.

“That chap is no doctor, but an analytical chemist, isn’t he?” he inquired.

“Yes,” said the man who had mentioned a noted drug-purveyor whose boast was that the authorities could never bring a definite charge against him.

“Watch him closely tonight—all night, if you can keep on his track without alarming him. I know he deals only through intermediaries, but it will be useful if you can get some of the stuff he supplies. No arrest, of course.”

“By the way, Sheldon, are those half-crowns ready?” said Winter.

“Yes, sir. Here are seven ‘Number Eights.’ I used counterfeits. They resemble the real thing perfectly.”

This raised a laugh. Sheldon was by way of being a semi-Scot, so he could not bear the defacing of real money.

Linton was almost thrilled at finding a number of "tokens" distributed. He gathered that they would be produced at the proper moment if a guarantee of good faith were demanded by some cautious but nearly hoodwinked rascal. He was not given one, from which fact he deduced that his immediate cue was to listen and say nothing.

At twenty minutes to eight Furneaux sprang up and called him from the gathering. Winter merely nodded when the little man left the room.

"I'll be with you as soon as possible," he said.

Furneaux hurried his companion into a taxi, and gave the address of an Italian restaurant in Dean Street.

"Soho is no place in which to keep a lady waiting," he explained. "But Miss Mainwaring promised not to arrive before eight, and you can spruce up a bit while I mount guard at the door."

"I'll be good, and do as I'm told," smiled Linton, "but there is one question I'm dying to put."

"Well, don't die, just yet."

"What part do I play in this quest?"

"Aren't you satisfied? You've had nearly all the

fat in the production thus far—that is, if you understand stage slang."

"Quite so, but I couldn't help noticing that I was completely left out of your plans at headquarters."

"For the very good reason that we have no plans. We must hook a bigger fish than Ruffini before we begin to think of laying Lefévre by the heels. That is where you come in. You have actually seen the man and two of his friends. That is a tremendous asset. Also you have heard him speak—"

"So has Miss Mainwaring."

"You have a most annoying trick of interruption. Can't you take your mind off that girl for ten consecutive seconds? Your eyes gleamed every time the Chief mentioned her. Now, not a word about Lord Robert Ferris. If she finds out that you are a friend of his, she'll be scared to death."

This tirade amused Linton, but he ignored the greater part of it.

"I don't agree with you," he said quietly. "Miss Mainwaring is not the sort of young female who goes in at the deep end about a rattle-pate like Bobby Ferris. But there must be some member of the Copmanthorpe household in whom he is interested. I cannot imagine him having much in common with a solemn person like a Cabinet minister."

He did not catch the scrutinising glance Furneaux threw at him then. They were crossing Trafalgar Square close to King Charles's statue, and a Victoria 'bus nearly collided with the taxi. Language followed, brief, lurid, and much to the point. Each driver formed a rapid and most unfavourable judgment of the other, and said so. A traffic policeman wanted to join in the discussion, but faded away at a wink from Furneaux. And there was no further talk about Lord Robert Ferris or the Copmanthorpe household.

Miss Mainwaring was delayed, though Furneaux was sure she would arrive promptly at eight. Linton, however, directed by Signor Pucci, the enormously stout proprietor of the Ristorato Milano, was washed and combed, and back at the front door of the restaurant again before Miss Mainwaring's taxi drew up at the kerb.

A tall young man alighted first, and held the door open for her.

"And, pray, whom have we here?" said Furneaux vexedly.

"Mr. Frederick Blenkey, of Ewell," murmured Linton in his ear.

"Ah, those infernal newspapers again!" growled the detective.

Of course, Fred had read of his Monica's plight,

and had caught the next train to London. He was so distressed that Peggy thought it advisable to bring him with her, as she did not know how much or how little to tell him. She explained this breathlessly after paying the taxi-driver.

"Monica is in good hands, and will be in the pink after a few days' rest," announced Furneaux confidently. "What are you, Blenkey?"

"I'm with my father in a small market garden, sir," came the answer.

"Would you know those two fellows again—the two who made a fuss about losing a half-crown on Box Hill yesterday?"

"Know 'em! I'd know 'em better than their mothers would after I was through with them if I got half a chance," vowed Fred.

"Can you be spared from the market garden for a day or two if your expenses are paid?"

"Yes, sir. But mayn't I see Monica?"

"No, you may not, until the end of the week. Report at Scotland Yard tomorrow morning at 9.45, and bring a bag. Now, don't loiter here another moment, there's a good chap. There are too many sharp eyes in this neighbourhood."

Fred lifted his hat, and was evidently about to bid the Honourable Peggy a respectful farewell, but Fur-

neaux hissed, "No names!", so he made off, though not without a puzzled look at Linton. He could not guess that this half-recognition was a point in his favour.

Furneaux hustled his guests upstairs to a room on the first floor.

"Blenkey may earn his keep," he confided to them. "Now, Inspector, when the waiter comes—a fellow all white apron, bushy eyebrows and black hair—tell him to stage three Martinis, and have dinner ready for four in fifteen minutes. I am not ordering a cocktail for you, Miss Mainwaring, but I hope you will take a glass of Pucci's three-star Chianti. He gets it direct from Turin. Our blushing Inspector will entertain you while I remove the dust of Surrey and the grime of London. Mr. Winter will be with us soon."

The two young people were left gazing at each other. Linton, expressly forbidden to discuss the one topic he was interested in for the moment, essayed valiantly to avoid it.

"Our diminutive friend packs a lot into a few words," he said.

"Yes," pouted Peggy. "He says anything he wants to say himself, but tells everybody else they mustn't dare open their mouths."

This remark had such a curious aptness that Linton was hard put to it to conceal his surprise.

"Please don't do him an injustice," he said. "It was not his fault that you were carried off before luncheon today."

"I know that quite well," she said, unpinning a hat with a hanging veil. "That stupid person, Lord Robert Ferris, must not only chase after me to Dorking but get me called to Scotland by tomorrow morning's train from King's Cross."

Linton was suddenly aware of a sharp pang of disappointment.

"That is too bad," was all he could find to say.

Quite unaware of what he was doing, he allowed his eyes to dwell rather fixedly on Peggy's wealth of brown hair.

"What's the matter?" she inquired anxiously. "I was horribly rushed by Fred's coming to the house at half-past seven."

"I was only thinking you had brought some of the golden sunset into this stuffy room," he said. "I don't think I have ever before noticed such varying tints in the strands of a woman's hair."

Peggy reddened a little, but laughed.

"It's not peroxide, if that is what you mean," she said.

"I have always understood that the peroxide stage came somewhat late in life," he retorted.

"Just about the time a man's hair begins to fall off."

"Probably. About the period of the silver wedding, in fact."

"That's looking rather far ahead, isn't it?"

"This is my first attempt to peer into the future in that respect. But please pardon the comment. I just blurted out the first words that came to mind. I suppose one's nerves relax unconsciously, though I used to pride myself on not having nerves, and have never sympathised sufficiently with fellows who suffered from shell-shock. Maybe, it is by force of contrast. After a hectic day, here am I dining with—you."

Peggy's heart throbbed a little then. She knew full well that this good-looking Inspector of police was telling her that he admired her, and doing it with a boyish reserve immensely more effective than the outspoken compliments to which she was accustomed. She wondered how a housemaid, or lady's maid, as she was supposed to be, for Furneaux had warned her that no one in Dorking was aware of her true status, would behave in such conditions.

"Evidently, you are not married," she tittered, "or you would not care what colour my hair was."

"That is profoundly true," he said. "I am not married, nor likely to be, for some years, if ever. May I explain that somewhat cryptic remark?"

"Why?"

"Because, if a man is not a prig, he should not pose as one."

"Oh, please, do tell."

"I have given no thought to marriage, as I am not in a position to maintain a wife."

"But, my goodness, that shouldn't stop you from trying to find the right girl!"

"It has done so—hitherto."

Peggy was profoundly thankful that an Italian waiter should enter just then, and be despatched for cocktails. She regained her breath during the interlude, short though it was.

"You've told me absolutely nothing about all the exciting things the evening papers talk about," she protested.

"I have not set eyes on a newspaper since seven o'clock this morning, but I shall be astonished if any journalist knows half what you know, Miss Mainwaring. However, here goes!" And he gave her a fairly comprehensive resumé of the Ruffini incident and other minor circumstances. She was immensely amused at hearing of the mole on the shoulder-blade of the

lady who purchased a costume in the Rue Blanche.

"Surely, even Mr. Furneaux doesn't regard that as a clue!" she cried. "It will be splendid as identification, but first you have to catch the woman."

"And half strip her," put in the little detective himself. "Yet I admit that your sex saves a lot of trouble in that respect nowadays."

"Not when we are liable to display large moles," Peggy retorted.

"Anyhow, I see an appalling number of scraggy necks. Ah, here comes a genial ruffian who is an authority on such matters!"

The Chief entered, smiling.

"I was half afraid you might have elected to travel North by the night train, Miss Mainwaring," he said.

"But how did you hear anything about my going to Scotland?" demanded Peggy, round-eyed.

"Your butler is a much-worried man these days. Fearing he might have said too much to Lord Robert Ferris, he rang up my office, and Mr. Sheldon, in my absence, telegraphed to Lord Copmanthorpe requesting him to permit you to remain in London. When you reach home this evening you may find that your journey has been countermanded."

"Oh, I do hope so," she cried delightedly. "I shall

eat with a good appetite now. And, indeed, I ought to. I missed my luncheon, and have only had a cup of tea since breakfast."

"All being well, you will be given the best dinner London can provide. Have you seen Signor Pucci?"

"The fat man?"

"Yes. He eats his own food. What a testimonial! Do you hear the stairs creaking? He is coming to tell us what he is providing for the feast. We dine here on all really great occasions, such as this, though you would never imagine it by looking at Furneaux."

"In effect," smirked Furneaux, "you can now see the vital distinction between a *gourmand* and a *gourmet*! Pucci, of course, being a professional, is *hors de concours*."

Peggy took his point instantly. Her eyes danced in rapid survey of the three men.

"You and I, Mr. Linton," she said, "are between the horns of a dilemma. I take it that if we eat with a good appetite we shall emulate Mr. Winter in size, but if we are Spartan in our choice of food we may resemble Mr. Furneaux."

"My advice is that you follow whatever system you have adopted thus far," said Linton.

Signor Pucci came in.

"Silence now for the oracle!" commanded the Chief, and his seriousness evoked a laugh. Most certainly the sinister shadow of Monsieur Lefévre was not permitted to cast any gloom on that merry gathering.

CHAPTER X

DISCOVERIES

A MOST pleasant and excellent meal passed without the diners being disturbed by telephone or official messenger, though, to be sure, both Winter and Furneaux looked for quick results from the campaign of inquiry they had set on foot. It was still daylight at half-past nine, when Linton was given the pleasant task of escorting Miss Mainwaring to Curzon-street.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't walk?" inquired the girl.

"None whatever," said the Chief. "Turn to the right, and you will be in Oxford-street in a few minutes. Mr. Furneaux and I will leave later. If you are at the Yard about 10.30, Mr. Linton, Sheldon will tell you where you lodge for the night. He is trying to secure a bed for you somewhere near the Strand."

"Why shouldn't I stay at my Club?"

"What Club?"

"The Rag."

"That will suit admirably."

"I'll call there on my way, and see if they have a vacant room."

Furneaux caught a meditative gleam in the Honourable Peggy's eye, but passed no comment until the two young people had gone.

"Explanations will now follow," he said then, watching Winter lighting a fresh cigar.

"And not before time. Why should we want that poor lad to be plagued by an impossible love affair?"

"*Nom d'un nom!* Why 'impossible'?"

"Have you forgotten that Lord Copmanthorpe is Home Secretary—by special request of the Prime Minister?"

"Yes, a Home Secretary with a seat in the House of Lords! One peep of snobbery out of him, one undemocratic shake of the head, and the band of Scottish brothers on the Labour benches will rend him limb from limb."

Winter flung away the remains of a match with a gesture that was almost impatient.

"Are we chasing rogues or running a matrimonial bureau?" he cried.

"We needn't do a thing more for Arthur and Peggy. Did you twig how they swallowed each other with every course? Arthur was saying to himself how idyllic life would be if such a girl sat opposite regularly at meal-time, and she was thinking how safe she would feel in the arms of a fine, upstanding—"

"Oh, cut it out, for Heaven's sake! Let's just make sure they are all right, and then hurry to headquarters."

Certainly, neither Peggy nor her companion was aware that a taxi containing the men they had just quitted turned down Regent-street when they themselves crossed Oxford Circus. It was within the bounds of reasonable chance that they might have been shadowed by some human ferret prowling around Soho, so the detectives made sure—that was all. Linton, it is true, did not forget to keep his eyes about him, but it is difficult to exercise several senses at once, and Miss Peggy was occupying his mind almost exclusively at that moment.

She put him on the rack as soon as they left the restaurant.

"If you're a member of the Rag, you must have held a commission," she said.

"Yes," he agreed.

"What regiment were you in?"

"The East Kents."

Silence for a few seconds. Obviously, the girl was puzzled as to the best way of phrasing the next question.

"I wasn't cashiered, or anything like that," he went on with a smile. "I had to consider the future, and

the Army seemed to offer a dead end after the war. There are heaps of young captains with the D.S.O., and they cannot all become generals. As a matter of fact, I couldn't see myself a Colonel in twenty years, and I had a perfect horror of becoming a time-expired Major. So I chose the police, in which the prospects are fair."

"Do you mean in the higher ranks?"

"Yes. My uncle, Colonel Hollies, is keeping a Chief-constableship warm for me, but—"

"But what?"

"I am beginning to dread the social complexities of life in England. Really, it would appear that a fellow might be happier on the land, in South Africa, or California, or Western Canada."

"Why, only this morning you were saying—"

"Yes, I admit a remarkable change in my opinions."

"What brought it about?"

"I can hardly express myself clearly—yet."

Peggy had already gained some slight experience of Linton's trick of adding a remarkably suggestive word to a sentence which might otherwise have been complete without it, thus altering its meaning entirely.

"I see," she said, after a little pause.

"I'm glad of that," he could not help commenting.

"Or, I think I do. I'm only a girl, with little expe-

rience of the world, but one must be stupid indeed if one fails to realise that the pleasant Old England of other days has gone, and that a rather unpleasant New England is taking its place. That isn't a sly dig at the American invasion. What I mean is that our people are unhappy, dissatisfied, disunited, ready to listen to any crank who promises them a Utopia without work. No wonder all the oak-trees in our parks are dying! Oh, you needn't look at me as though the new moon had affected my wits. I, too, have been thinking hard today. Who wouldn't, after what has happened during the past twenty-four hours? And that is why I am sure Mr. Furneaux's theory is right. Evil thoughts can be put into the mind of the public just as deadly germs can be introduced into its body. But —excuse plain speaking, Captain Linton—even a mere woman, or a slip of a girl, whichever you choose to regard me as, might well imagine that a man like you would prefer your recent adventures in England to growing oranges in the Far West or Farthest South."

"The two occupations differ in the extreme."

"A Chief Constableship is quite a well-paid post, isn't it?"

"Yes, as things go."

"Yet you have suddenly grown dissatisfied with the professional outlook?"

"Yes."

"But, how odd!"

The Honourable Peggy was playing with fire, and she knew it, but every woman is a born salamander in some respects. Thus, she had literally compelled Linton to either tell her the literal truth—that an embryonic Chief Constable simply cannot marry a girl in domestic service—or wrench the conversation into a new channel. She was well aware that he would neither do the one thing nor be willing to attempt the other, and, sad to relate, she enjoyed his dilemma. But this young man had brains, and was using them.

"I am sure you do not mean to taunt me," he said quietly. "Some day you will understand that unforeseen circumstances can arise in a man's life which he has to face candidly if they affect his career. Indeed, I can promise now that you shall know what those circumstances are, but not until Monsieur Lefévre and his gang are hanged or sent to penal servitude."

Peggy flinched at that. It occurred to her suddenly that she was hardly acting quite fairly to one who had virtually told her she was the cause of his new worries. Then she reddened to her shoulder-blades as she perceived, just in the nick of time, that the avowal trembling on her lips was tantamount to saying that

there was no great social disparity between a peer's daughter and a budding Chief Constable of an important county.

So it was she, and not Linton, who was compelled to change the subject, though, true daughter of Eve, she could not make up her mind to get rid of it altogether.

"As you are a member of the Rag, you probably know Lord Robert Ferris?" she said.

"Oh, yes. Of course, being poor, I am not in his set, and he would be vastly amused if he met me in my police sergeant's uniform. But he is not a bad chap. How came he to drag you away from Dorking today? Is he a close friend of some member of Lord Copmanthorpe's family?"

"He has been one of that crowd for years," she answered airily. "Poor old Hobbs, the butler—if ever you meet Mr. Hobbs you will appreciate the humour of the situation—blurted out something this morning about the terrible doings in Curzon-street and elsewhere, so Lord Robert thought it his duty to interfere."

"Where you were concerned?"

"Well, yes. He couldn't exactly grab poor Monica out of bed, could he?"

Peggy preened herself on the subtlety of that reply.

But Linton was a single-minded person. She herself had started the hare, and he proceeded to course it ruthlessly.

"I would like to understand exactly why he thought fit to follow you all the way to Dorking. If he were sent by someone who had more authority than a butler, all well and good. If not, he behaved with an impudence for which he ought to be called to account."

"Oh, dear me! Didn't I tell you that Lady Copmanthorpe telegraphed most emphatically ordering me North tomorrow? I don't know even yet whether I am reprieved or not."

"You would prefer to stay?"

"Of course, I would. What girl wouldn't? Existence in Mayfair can be horribly dull, even when brightened with motor-rides with the Bobby Ferrises of society."

"Still, I am puzzled," persisted Linton. "Did Lady Copmanthorpe literally request Ferris to pursue you and bring you home?"

"No. Not exactly. I rather suspect Mr. Hobbs. But, here we are at the end of Davies-street. I only have to walk a few yards now, so I must say 'good night.' I've had an awfully jolly and exciting evening, as I never knew the minute the Ristorato Milano might go up with a loud bang."

"May I not come with you, and find out what has been decided as to your possible journey to-morrow?"

"And give Mr. Hobbs further ground for suspicion? Oh, no. Telephone me in the morning, before nine. I shall not leave earlier, even if I have to catch the Scotch express."

"Which is your house?"

"That Georgian one, with the curved windows."

"Well, I shall watch you until you are safe behind the closed door. Which way do you enter?"

"By the main door—after ten. Good-bye. You'll be sure to telephone?"

"Not even Mr. Furneaux shall stop me."

"I mean that I want to hear from you if I go away—about the present excitement, of course. You wouldn't care to write to me otherwise."

The naughty girl sped off then. She raced through a comparatively empty street, and was on the point of running up the few steps to her residence when a man seemed to spring out of nowhere in particular. He hailed her with a husky: "Beg pardon, Miss. May I have a word with you? Do you live here?"

Peggy had plenty of courage, but it took all her nerve to stand fast and say steadily:

"Yes. What is it?"

"I'd like to see the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring for a few seconds."

"Why not ring, and inquire for her?"

"I've done it twice, an' been shooed off, while each time a cop has grabbed me to ask my business. Here he comes again now!"

Sure enough, a burly person in plain clothes was advancing rapidly down the street. Linton, too, must be approaching from the other end, so Peggy grew confident.

"I am Miss Mainwaring," she admitted.

"Well, I've taken a chance in comin' here, an' may be locked up for it, but that's nothing. Keep indoors, Miss! Better still, get away from London. I mean well, so, mum's the word! Remember, Miss, I was only askin' for a job."

"I'll speak to Mr. Hobbs, if you wish," she said clearly, "but fear it is not of much use, as this house will probably be closed early in July."

"Now, then!" came a cold, official voice. "You here again? What did I tell you last time?"

The detective grabbed the man with the decisive air of one who would stand no more nonsense, but Peggy heard Linton behind her, and turned. With true feminine impulse, swayed only by intuition, she had resolved to champion the unknown.

"Please, Mr. Linton," she cried, "don't let this poor fellow be arrested. He meant no harm. He—he merely wanted me to intercede with our people in his behalf, as he is out of work."

The detective, a district man, had never heard of Linton, and certainly would not have freed his prisoner because of representations made by a stranger. But he knew the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring well by sight, it being part of his duty to memorise the faces and physique of certain important residents in Mayfair.

"Very well, Miss," he said, before Linton could utter a word. "But I ought to warn this chap he is risking a lot in way-laying young ladies like you in the street. . . . What's your name?" and he looked sternly into the intruder's eyes.

"Robert Jenks."

"Where do you live?"

"Anywhere, an' anyhow."

"So I should think. Do you know who you've been speaking to?"

"Of course, I do. Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter. She don't remember me, but she's been a good friend to my mother for the last two years."

Peggy's face was scarlet now. She alone could interpret accurately Linton's amazed silence, and, indeed, the detective's suspicious gaze had turned on him more

than once already. But she pulled herself together sufficiently to cry in astonishment:

"Are you the soldier son of Mrs. Jenks, who lives in Riverside Cottages, near the Peak?"

"Yes, Miss. That's why I made bold to say what I did."

Linton had found his tongue by this time.

"There seems to be a certain indefiniteness about the identity of more than one person present," he said, and the metallic rasp in his utterance was altogether new in Peggy's ears. "What regiment did you serve in?"

"The Royal Fusiliers."

"Which battalion?"

"The 5th. But, I don't see—"

"Are you Lance-Corporal Jenks, of B. Company?"

"Yes, sir." The man unconsciously squared his shoulders and surveyed his questioner with a sudden intentness.

"I recall both your face and your voice now," smiled Linton. "I suppose you have not forgotten the night on the Menin pavé, when you guided the relief by the sparks struck from the flints by a Boche machine gun which had the range?"

"Lord love a duck! You're Captain Linton, of the East Kents!"

"Well, suppose we allow Miss Mainwaring—whose courtesy title I am not yet acquainted with—to go inside her house. Then you and I can have a chat about old times. I may be able to help, too."

"I must find another opportunity to explain matters," said Peggy, trying desperately hard to be dignified and self-possessed. "Others than you have experienced difficulties as to correct nomenclature, Sergeant—I beg your pardon, I should have said Inspector—or is it Captain?—Linton?"

Having achieved the last word, though not with convincing success, she hastened up the steps and let herself in with a latch-key. At that moment the telephone rang, and the butler appeared.

"That'll be her ladyship, Miss," he said uneasily. "Lady Copmanthorpe has called twice, and is very much upset."

Peggy had not many seconds in which to collect her wits before her mother was demanding, in the staccato accents of maternal annoyance, where she had been, and what on earth "all this" meant.

Peggy was quite firm, as every well-regulated young woman nowadays has to be with one or both of her parents.

"It is quite obvious, dearest," she said calmly, "that you have worked yourself up into a state of agitation

about nothing in particular. Haven't you received my telegrams?"

"Yes. But—"

"And isn't it evident that I cannot say over the public telephone what I told you I had written and posted in good time for the North mail?"

"Yes. That is not the point. And please don't begin lecturing me."

"Darling, a simple statement of fact is not a lecture."

"Peggy, what is the matter with you? Why should not your father and I be alarmed when, in the existing conditions, we call three times in two hours, and are told you are out, and that Hobbs has no idea where to get in touch with you? It is just the same with Bobby Ferris."

"Has he been out, too?"

"You know very well what I mean. He is consumed with anxiety about you."

"Have you been 'phoning him?"

"Really, Peggy, anyone would think from your tone that it was I, and not you, who had been behaving in such an extraordinary way."

"Mother, dear. Don't we belong to the Home Secretary's family?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I simply dare not explain, except that I have been dining with officials, and that two detectives have just seen me enter our front door. I am in no danger."

"But you must be. If not, why should Scotland Yard—"

"Please, darling."

"Well, I really don't know what to say. You may be right. Probably you are. But on no account leave the house again until I ring in the morning."

"So I am not to come North?"

"No. Dear, oh, dear! I am so worried that I haven't told you we are joining you as soon as possible —by tomorrow night's mail, in fact."

"That is splendid. So dad is able to travel?"

"Yes. At any rate, he feels he ought to be in London."

"Then wild horses shall not drag me out again before I hear from you—about breakfast-time, I suppose. Good night, darling. Sleep well!"

"One thing more. I promised Bobby you would give him a call, and reassure him."

"Oh, of course, I'll do that—with pleasure."

The sheer joy of the undertaking was manifest a few minutes later when she obtained a number at some residential mansions in St. James's-street.

"That you, Bobby?" she said.

"Hello, Peggy!" came the reply. "By Jove, it's a relief to hear your voice. Where are you speaking from?"

"Home. Will you do something to oblige me, Bobby?"

"Just try me."

"Well, I only want you to mind your own business for the next day or two. It's a slight request. Can't you take your company for a route march, or examine the canteen accounts, or do something equally valuable and time-consuming?"

"Look here, old girl—"

"I can't. I'm tired, and rather cross. But, for goodness' sake, cease from worrying mother, who will be here on Saturday. So long!"

In effect, the Honourable Peggy's small world was in a whirl, and she was beginning to feel the strain of continually readjusting her mental poise.

While crossing the hall she noticed a table and two easy chairs in the cloak-room, and asked why certain plates and glasses were set forth. The butler explained.

"An Inspector called here an hour ago, Miss," he said, "and wished me to arrange some place where two

men could sit all night. They will come on duty at eleven."

"Two policemen?"

"Yes, Miss. It seems the house has to be guarded inside as well as out."

"What fun! Are we at war again, Hobbs?"

"Looks like it, Miss. A rough-spoken sort of fellow called here twice this evening—"

"A man named Jenks?"

"So he said."

"Oh, he's all right. I met him outside."

The butler had to be satisfied with this cryptic remark, as his young mistress went straight to her room. She did not turn on the light, but opened a window, and looked down into Curzon-street, which was somewhat more animated now, as people were coming home from late dinners or early concerts. In another hour, when the theatres closed, the thoroughfare would be busy again. She could discern nothing unusual or out of the way in the external aspect of things. London was peaceful and decorous as ever. Yet she sat there a long time, peering into the lamp-lit vistas, though hardly seeing them, for her thoughts were with a man who, if words meant anything, had dreamed of sacrificing a career for the sake of a girl

—a girl whom he had met for the first time only thirty hours earlier.

Meanwhile, there had been a somewhat earnest discussion on the pavement. The detective, whose name was Dewar, was by no means prepared to part company with the two men who had come together so unexpectedly, while Linton had his own reasons for not wishing to declare openly what his present occupation was.

Dewar insisted so strenuously that the others should accompany the nearest policeman to the district station that his colleague had no option but to produce a warrant card, which, of course, put matters right instantly. As Linton had foreseen, however, Jenks became intractable then.

"What d'ye want with me, anyhow?" came the sulky demand. "The young lady told you straight enough why I tackled her, didn't she?"

"Yes," agreed Linton. "That is not the point. As an old comrade in the field, I am ready to give you a helping hand, but we ought to talk things over first. I have half an hour to spare. Why not come and have a drink, and some supper?"

Jenks had suddenly grown furtive and restless. His eyes peered hither and thither. He seemed to expect, or fear, that something would happen.

"If you're in the police, sir," he almost whispered, "I daren't be seen with you, an' that's Gord's own truth!"

"I won't ask you why, though your nerves must be in a poor way if you are afraid of any danger here. Now, let me persuade you. Let us take that taxi, and drive to a restaurant in the Strand. No one can possibly know we are in the car, or where we are going. Come, Jenks! Pull yourself together. You didn't need telling that on the Menin Road. So, why now?"

Still unwilling, and watching the street both ways, Jenks allowed himself to be led to the vacant taxi, which had just brought four people to a neighbouring house. He sighed with relief when the vehicle was in the thick of the traffic along Piccadilly.

"Well, I've gone an' done it now," he muttered, as though reasoning with himself. "Done meself in twice tonight, I have, for I couldn't bear to stand by an' see that nice young lady blown to bits without my havin' warned her. But they'll get me for this, as sure as the Lord made little apples."

"I don't agree with you. You're low-spirited, and run down, or you would never believe that a gang of lunatics and criminals can work their will on the people of this country."

"What's that? What do you know about it?" and

Jenks's consternation was now so overpowering that he literally trembled.

"A good deal. Don't think for a moment that high explosives and deadly drugs can be manufactured in England without the authorities becoming aware of the facts. Neither can Communistic bosh be preached only to those prepared to swallow it. But, we cannot talk here. Wait till we have eaten something, and find some place where we can have a quiet smoke."

"Where are we goin'?"

"To a café in the Strand. You heard me telling the driver."

Jenks threw out his hands helplessly.

"I only hope it won't vanish off the map while we're in it," he muttered. "But I'm game, for all that. I haven't had a square meal for weeks, though I was promised a good supper tonight, later on."

A dozen questions suggested by those few words leaped to Linton's mind, yet he dared put one alone —the vitally important one.

"Why have you a notion that a perfectly harmless chophouse should be blown to pieces tonight?" he said, forcing a laugh.

"Because something is goin' to happen tonight, sir, though I don't know what, or when, or where. They

don't tell us poor fellows much. We're to have our innings when London is half in ruins, they say."

It was an exasperating position, but Linton kept his head. He saw no good purpose to be served by deviating from his original plan. By hook or by crook, he meant bringing Jenks in touch with Winter and Furneaux as quickly as possible, but the man was manifestly so scared that he had to be handled gently, or he might break down completely.

"Well," he said cheerfully, "here we are! I'm afraid we cannot get a drink, but there will be enough to eat, and I'll find some whiskey or beer elsewhere. . . . Hello! What's up now?"

Jenks, white-lipped and terror-stricken, had shrunk behind him, as a tall, elderly, well-dressed man emerged from the door of the restaurant, and actually hired the cab they had quitted.

"Can you be at Paddington station by 10.30?" said this person to the taxi-driver.

"I'll try," was the answer.

"Double fare if you do it," and the taxi made off
"That's one of 'em," whispered Jenks. "He's one who talks to us fellows. D'ye think he twigged me? If so, my number's up."

Again Linton had to let an opportunity pass.

"Oh, come on!" he said, disregarding his companion's cowering attitude. "If we don't hurry we shan't get a steak, and that is what you want just now more than anything else in creation!"

CHAPTER XI

“ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS”

ADHERING resolutely to the line of action he had mapped out, Linton did everything in his power to restore self-confidence and will-power to this broken man. To begin with, he interested him in a menu, and persuaded him to begin the satiation of a ravenous hunger by taking a plate of soup. Singularly enough, the next thing Jenks asked for was a supply of cold beef and pickles. It did not occur to Linton until later that the poor fellow sought what was most quickly obtainable. He himself nibbled at a lobster salad, thinking he could thus conceal his own lack of appetite.

Though grudging each second of delay, and literally afire with the knowledge that here, at last, was one who might know something of the murderous schemes in which Lefévre and his associates were engaged, he exerted himself to the utmost not only to conceal his own anxiety but to allay his companion's. He succeeded so well that Jenks was soon talking freely of the “old days,” and actually expressing the hope that

there might be another war, "as a fellow then knew where he was, an' the government thought something of him."

At last, when the bill was paid, the two went out, and Linton hailed a taxi, saying, with smiling carelessness, that he had not heard yet where his rooms were situated, and would have to find out. In effect, Jenks was inside the quadrangle of New Scotland Yard before he recognised that ominous environment.

By this time, however, the precise mental process which Linton looked for had taken place in the man's mind. He was back again in the friendly relationship of officer and private on active service. He felt, somehow, that the weight of British law and order was supporting instead of oppressing him. With the natural instincts of a sound-hearted outcast who, after listening perforce to evil counsels, yet could not endure the knowledge that a girl who had befriended his mother should be in danger from the very schemes he was ready to assist, he rallied now to a call which in reality he understood very much better.

"So, I'm here, am I?" he said grimly, as they were halted by the constable on duty. "Well, fall in the escort, with fixed bayonets!"

"There is no escort, and no bayonets," Linton assured him. "I want you to meet one or two men higher

up. That is all. I undertake that you will be free to go when you please. But, as a reasonable human being, you should ascertain first where certain rascals are leading you, and then decide whether you will throw in your lot with them or with us."

The message he sent to Mr. Winter secured a prompt summons to the Chief's office. Furneaux and Sheldon were present also, and they had been busy, apparently, as the big table was littered with memoranda in orderly disorder.

Linton told his story with soldier-like brevity, and saw that the others were greatly impressed by its possibilities. He touched lightly on the absence of alcoholic refreshment during the meal; the Chief took the cue instantly. Rising, he unlocked a cupboard and produced a bottle, a syphon, and a tumbler.

"I keep a small supply of liquor here for strictly medicinal purposes," he said blandly. "You, Mr. Jenks, have been under the weather, so I prescribe a fair-sized dose, well diluted. Are you a smoker? Will you have a cigar, or do you prefer a pipe?"

"I'd like a cig, sir, if you have one," came the quite cheerful answer.

The Chief did not indulge in cigarettes, but Sheldon proffered a well-filled case.

"Now, Jenks," went on Winter agreeably, with the air of one who had not a care in the world, "you have probably done yourself as well as Miss Mainwaring a good turn by your action this evening. Do you know what has been happening at Dorking? Have you seen the evening newspapers?"

Yes, the ex-soldier had picked one up in Piccadilly Circus, but had only suspected the connection between the Surrey contingent and those with whom he had been brought in contact in certain clubs and popular institutions where one got a bed cheaply.

"Somebody seems to have been firing off gas-shells an' Black Marias down there," he said, "but that's nothing to what is planned for London tonight. The Government is goin' to be terrified, sir—that's what they said. We fellows, the under-dogs, are not to make a move till we're taken off the leash—that's the way they put it—but tonight's show is meant to prove that the men behind the social revolution are in earnest."

"I take it you really have no notion what these people have in mind."

"No, sir. Just a general bust-up. It may be the Houses of Parliament, or Westminster Abbey—these lads have a special down on the Church—or some offices in Whitehall, or some big hotels, or all the lot,

for what I know, but the idea is to scare the public and puzzle the police. I remember those very words being used.”

“By whom?”

“By the chap Captain Linton an’ me met in the Strand tonight.”

“Do you know his name?”

“Names were never used, sir. It was always ‘a friend of the down-trodden.’ ”

“Did they ever give you any money, or food?”

“Precious little of either. We were to help ourselves when the smash came.”

“What sort of smash?”

“The upset of the whole caboodle—law-courts, City an’ West End. They mean it, too, guv’nor. All the houses are marked. I heard about Lord Copmanthorpe’s place being on the first list, and, thinking it might be for tonight, I just had to go an’ tell that nice young lady to look after herself.”

“What time tonight?”

“Eleven o’clock, some of our boys said, but I don’t know who told them.”

The Chief glanced at a clock; at that moment the chimes of Big Ben came through an open window.

“If anything happens—” he began, but a telephone jarred at his elbow.

"Harrow-road police station," said a voice. "Sergeant Davies speaking. At ten-fifty a taxi-cab travelling east along Praed-street, near St. Mary's Hospital, was blown to pieces. The explosion was tremendous, and was followed by a fire which resembled the action of an incendiary bomb. Three passers-by were killed, and several people are seriously injured. Fortunately, the driver of another taxi, making for Paddington, had just passed the vehicle which blew up, and he recognised the chauffeur as a mate. We are making inquiries, and will ring again if we ascertain anything further before midnight. The street is now blocked by thousands, which makes things difficult."

"Let us hear from you at any hour," said the Chief.
"Do you want help?"

"I think not, sir. Our special squad is on duty, as per today's general order."

"Good! Hold on a second." Winter passed the 'phone to Linton.

"Give the best description you can supply of the fellow you saw outside the Strand Restaurant at a quarter past ten," he said, "and ask Sergeant Davies to circulate it at once, with direct and immediate reference to Paddington station."

Linton complied, and the others did not fail to notice

that Jenks was intensely interested. Winter nodded to Furneaux, who tackled the new witness in an undertone.

"I suppose you cannot tell us much more tonight which will be useful?" he inquired.

"I'm afraid not, mister," said Jenks. "The fact is, I'm dead tired. Me mind won't work."

"I thought so. Now, I will send for one of the men on night duty, who will take you to a room in a quiet street close by. Tomorrow morning Inspector Sheldon will arrange for your breakfast to be brought in at 8.30, and, if you give him particulars, he will be with you before nine o'clock with a new rig from top to toe. That, plus a shave, will make a new man of you. Then he will accompany you here, and, if you are willing, you can work with another ex-soldier, under Captain Linton's orders. This will give you a fresh start in life, and hardly anyone will recognise you when you are properly dressed. But—you must be with us body and soul. Will you do this?"

"Would a duck swim?" agreed Jenks with enthusiasm.

Linton could not help smiling as this latest recruit left the room.

"What are you grinning at?" squeaked the little man, during a pause while Sergeant Davies was writing industriously at the other end of the wire.

"I hear my bed vanishing, and, of course, I couldn't call at the Rag," was the *sotto voce* answer.

"I don't care tuppence where *you* sleep," snapped Furneaux. "Probably at the Ritz, as you seem to fall on feathers and fine linen all the time. *Cré nom!* What luck to find Jenks! And all through that girl!"

"What luck to be able to sleep anywhere!" sighed the Chief. "I seem to be in for an all-night session. This blow-up in Praed-street is the best thing yet. It promises really well. Gee! Who says that a policeman's lot is not a happy one? Doing constabulary duty beats the Grand Guignol melodramas sky-high these days. . . . Finished, Mr. Linton? Well, take that other 'phone, and see if your Club can provide, though Heaven only knows what time you will turn in. If Jenks's information is correct there may be more serious bangs in London tonight than this at Paddington. . . . Didn't I say something about medicine? I imagine we can all do with a small reviver," and he staged four more glasses.

"Did you enjoy your after-dinner stroll with the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring?" inquired Furneaux, when Linton had booked a room at the Army and Navy Club.

The younger man suppressed the obvious question

as to why he had been denied any real knowledge of the lady's identity.

"Yes," he said.

"Is that all you have to say? Not a word of thanks, for instance?"

"I nearly succeeded in making a fool of myself, if that is what you are anxious to know."

"Not at all. I took that for granted. Did she put you through the third degree when she discovered who you were?"

"Something of the kind. Certainly, she was not very communicative. I was in absolute ignorance of the fact that she was Lord Copmanthorpe's daughter until poor Jenks blurted it out, under compulsion, so to speak, from a gentleman named Dewar."

"Ha! Dewar. A genuine cop. What a scream, that Detective Dewar should figure as the messenger of the gods!"

Linton actually blushed, whereupon the Chief broke in.

"Pay no heed to this shrimp," he said. "He means well, and don't forget that if you had known yesterday, or even today, what you know now, it is highly probable that events would have taken an entirely different course. You see that, don't you?"

"I—suppose so, sir," was the hesitating reply.

"Do you doubt it?" cackled Furneaux. "Both you and she would have aired your best drawing-room manners, which are horribly out of place when police work is in full swing. But, even if you were worried because you couldn't make love to an upper housemaid, no matter how charming she might be, you did devilish well in holding back so thoroughly at a moment when you must have wanted to leave Jenks and dash after the conspirator in the taxi. By the way, how did you learn to take in so much of his appearance at a glance? That touch about the brown silk tie and pearl pin was ultra-professional."

Linton laughed.

"I was taught that trick by my father," he explained. "He held that a soldier should begin early to train his eye and his memory, so, when I was a small boy, he would allow me one glance at a shop-window, and give me a penny for every object in it which I could name accurately afterwards. It was great fun. I well remember collecting two bob outside an ironmonger's place in York."

"You'll be a loss to the profession when you collar that Chief Constableship," said Furneaux. "I am almost sorry Miss Peggy isn't lowly-born. We might have kept you in the Yard. The girl herself may be willing, but her Pa and Ma would prove obdurate."

"Any more of this movie-stuff will drive me crazy!" growled Winter, reaching for a cigar-box. He was interrupted by the telephone. It was Sergeant Davies again.

"I sent a man on a bicycle to Paddington station," he said, "and he reports that a gentleman who answers to every detail of the description supplied took a Gladstone bag out of the cloak-room there about 10.40. He was in a great hurry, and carried it himself to a waiting taxi. It has also been ascertained that the driver of the cab was the poor chap killed in Praed-street ten minutes later."

"Why the delay?" inquired Winter sharply.

"What delay, sir?"

"Between the departure of the cab and the time of the explosion. There are fully five minutes unaccounted for. A taxi would reach St. Mary's Hospital in less than two minutes at that hour."

"I'll have further inquiries made, sir," said Harrow-road humbly. It may be stated now that the owner of the bag wasted nearly five minutes while the taxi was still in the station. Some porters who saw him thought he was rearranging the contents."

"I think I see light," cried Furneaux, propping his chin on both clenched fists, and resting his elbows on the table. "For some reason, possibly not unconnected

with events at Dorking, tonight's demonstration was called off, literally at the eleventh hour. I shall not be surprised to learn that the cloak-rooms of several important London termini were to be blown to smithereens at eleven o'clock. How easy—with clock-work machines! The scheme was postponed, by orders from headquarters, the bags were withdrawn, and the mechanism of the bombs stopped. The elderly gent whom Linton saw must have fumbled his job, or the time-indicator got slightly ahead of his calculations. I'll bet you a new hat, Chief, that our men are now picking pieces of his respectably-clad body off the shutters and doors of certain shop-fronts in Praed-street. . . . I do hope most sincerely they find that pearl pin. It should be given to Linton as a keepsake."

"That, and a certain half-crown," said Linton.

"Miss Mainwaring gets the half-crown, if she wants it, which I very much doubt. The Dorking chemist is the rightful recipient. That photograph of his was a masterpiece. But we have a long way to go before we begin distributing souvenirs, and some of us may not be alive to claim them. I despise criminals, as a class, but this bunch of crooks is well organised, and directed by a real brain."

"What proof is there yet of any supernormal intelligence being at work?" put in Winter.

"Jenks! That these scoundrels' propaganda should have got down to Jenks and his like is the most significant fact laid bare thus far. I pay little heed to high explosives. Hundreds of thousands of people in Europe know the chemical formulæ of all sorts of destructive agents, be they variants of TNT or chlorine gases. But the really dangerous thing is psychological knowledge, which enables those possessing it to play on the ignorance and prejudices of the multitude. The Jenkses of London and every other city in the world have only to gaze ferociously at the sleek men and too-expensively gowned women pouring out from the theatres at this hour, and hastening in costly limousines to restaurants and dancing clubs, that they should be ready to believe the crazy nostrums given them by so-called regenerators of the social system. That is the real peril—the world-wide powder magazine waiting to be fired by Lefévre's squibs. I say most earnestly that unless we crush this fellow soon the Great War will be child's play as compared with the Great Collapse."

Nothing could have more weight with a listener like Linton, accustomed as he was becoming to Furneaux's flippancy and sarcastic humour, than the little man's real seriousness at this moment. Those few tumultuous words seemed to open an illimitable vista of ruin

and terror and mob rule. Winter, too, was impressed. He laid down a cigar he was about to light.

"We are not wasting any time," he said slowly. "Considering that Lefévre has worked with such secrecy and cunning, we have got on his track fairly well in twenty-four hours."

"We've had a lot of luck, with precious little divination. Oh, yes—that is my special job, and I've fallen down badly. But, for Heaven's sake, smoke, or I'll believe that the sky is falling."

Winter picked up the cigar again.

"Sorry you're so hipped," he cried, with a cheerfulness which, if assumed, was highly creditable to his powers as an actor. "I'm puzzled, I admit, but not despondent. I have never yet seen a crank win his way by sheer force. He may succeed on the platform or in the press, or startle honest citizens by a book, but when it comes to a real fight between order and disorder he is no more prepared to encounter the power of the law than a quacking duck can resist having its neck wrung at the appointed time. . . . What do you say, Sheldon? You look at things differently from the rest of us. What is your opinion?"

The junior detective was inured to jokes about the peculiar difference in size between his right eye, which was large, and his left eye, which was small.

“I have at least the benefit of two points of view, sir,” he said with a smile, “so, while agreeing with Mr. Furneaux that there has been an almost phenomenal element of luck in our investigations thus far, I cannot help remembering that something of the kind takes place in connection with every big affair we tackle. That is only the beginning, however. Then our resources and experience come into the scale. You ask what I think of this business. I think Mr. Furneaux and you should be in bed as quickly as you can get there. You’re worn out. You’ve had a long day, and there may be a longer one in front of you tomorrow. I can remain here till two o’clock, and will leave a memorandum of anything that turns up.”

“A Daniel come to judgment!” cried the Chief, rising. “My own impression is that Lefévre and his crew are scared, and will lie low for a time, believing we shall be lulled into forgetfulness. Those fellows always hug that silly notion. I’ll bet you a new hat, Furneaux, there isn’t another explosion for a week.”

“Done! It will be the first new hat that fits your massive cranium I’ll pay for joyously.”

The blinds were not drawn, and the windows were open. Winter, who happened to be facing that way, and Furneaux and Linton, seated with their backs to the door, saw a vivid burst of light leap into the sky

over South London. Soon came a sullen boom which rattled the window panes.

"Talking of new hats!" chortled Furneaux.

"Now I'll believe that Nero did really fiddle while Rome burned," shouted the Chief angrily.

"That bang took place about a mile and a half away," announced Linton.

"Bed!" roared Winter derisively, glaring at Sheldon as though he were in some sense responsible for the latest development. "I can see myself in bed about Christmas-time if this sort of thing goes on."

"Shall I call Kennington-park-road, sir?" inquired Sheldon.

"What's the use? Wait till we hear from them. Are you sure about the distance, Linton?"

"Yes, sir. I counted the seconds between the flash and the sound."

"Then it cannot be Waterloo, and London Bridge is a long way to eastward. There is no important station in that direction. Perhaps these devils have blown themselves up!"

The telephone rang.

"The Chief Commissioner, of course," said Winter.
"By Jove, he's quick on the trigger!"

The instrument in use happened to be near Furneaux,

who took off the receiver. He handed it, with a grin, to Linton.

"A lady on the wire!" he said.

It was Peggy. She was distressed but apologetic.

"I do hope I am not interfering at an awkward moment," she said, "but, a little while ago I was seated at my bedroom window, looking out into the street, and thinking over my day's adventures, when I saw a blaze of light beyond the Marble Arch. I know it was beyond, because the Arch itself was silhouetted against it. Then came a bang. Soon afterwards two men appeared in our street, but ran away when someone, I think it was the detective who grabbed Jenks, challenged them. They were stopped by some policemen a little farther on, and there was a fight, though I am sure they were captured quickly. I felt I had to ring up, and tell someone, and, while waiting at the 'phone, I heard another bang. I cannot tell you how relieved I am to hear your voice."

"Please don't be alarmed, Miss Mainwaring," said Linton quietly. "Such skirmishes only reveal the enemy's position. The mere fact that those men were arrested in the street shows that you may sleep in safety."

"But, as it is you speaking, I want to apologise for my horrid behaviour today."

"What have *you* done that calls for apology?"

"Misleading you the way I did. But I was terrified of figuring in the newspapers."

"Line wanted!" broke in a voice, and the circuit was broken forthwith.

There were two 'phones in the room, and both were in demand now. Winter took the Commissioner's call, and Furneaux that from Kennington-park-road police-station. The Inspector in charge there announced that a furniture repository in South London had been wrecked by an explosion, and was completely destroyed by an extraordinarily fierce fire which followed. Two night-watchmen were assumed to have been killed, but, so far as was known, there were no other casualties, though many people in the neighbourhood complained of shock. The Fire Brigade was powerless to save any part of the warehouse, but was protecting adjoining property. Deponent thought the affair resembled the operations of the gang concerning which a general order had been issued that day.

Furneaux thanked him gravely, and said that his opinion would be communicated to the Commissioner without a moment's delay, which was true enough, if not in the sense understood by the gratified inspector.

The next call came from Vine-street, to inform headquarters that two men, charged with "loitering" in

Curzon-street, had resisted arrest. Nothing of a suspicious nature was found on them when searched, but they refused to give names or addresses, so were locked up.

Furneaux sprang from his chair.

"I'll see those lads tonight," he said. "This is one of the occasions when one longs for the full and free use of the torture chamber in the Tower. *Au revoir sans adieu.* Meet you all at 9.30 a. m.—per-haps."

"You be off, too!" cried Winter to Linton and Sheldon. "I'll sleep here. The newspapers will soon be on the job. Don't forget, Sheldon, you have to look after Jenks early tomorrow. Do him well. As usual, Furneaux is right. Jenks has suddenly become the nerve centre of our activities."

CHAPTER XII

“THE VOLCANO”

SHELDON had rooms in Shaftesbury Avenue, so Linton walked with him up Whitehall, after sending his bag in a taxi to the Army and Navy Club. The after-theatre rush of traffic had practically ended, and the spacious street—in many ways the most dignified thoroughfare in London—was empty enough to reveal the placid beauty of its varied architecture. The government offices on the west side were impressive in the half light of a June evening. They bore the guise of solid purpose, and seemed to represent the power and majesty of Britain. It was almost impossible to believe that the stage thunder of a number of crazy theorists could lay in ruins not only these stately buildings but all that they stood for.

Linton said something of this to his companion, of whom he knew nothing save that he was evidently a trusted associate of both Winter and Furneaux.

“I wouldn’t have had the slightest hesitation in agreeing with you before the war,” commented Sheldon thoughtfully. “Today I am not so sure. I think we

are passing through a transition period. Unknown forces have been let loose, and whether we like it or not, will direct our public life into new channels. If our people retain their traditional common sense, all will be well. If they yield to hysteria, and they are perilously near the border-line just now, we may still survive as a nation, but there will be some remarkable changes in the British temperament. I am certain of one thing. We, in our time, will never again see the contented and prosperous England of 1914.”

“But change is inevitable. Surely the future of the British Empire is not at the mercy of fanatics like Lefévre?”

“Not if we can make people understand the real danger of the situation. If Russia, eight years ago, could have visualised her condition today, the Revolution, even if it broke out, must have followed a very different course. That is the trouble. Political and economic experiments often produce unforeseen and lamentable results, but it’s a deuce of a job to get their advocates to admit the fact and mend their ways.”

“So you share Mr. Furneaux’s rather disconcerting pessimism?”

“One never knows what Furneaux actually has at

the back of his head. For one thing, quicksilver, not red blood, runs in his veins. For another, he is a creature of impulse, and is now thoroughly annoyed because he has failed so far to arrive at some extraordinarily acute bit of inductive reasoning which shall reveal who Lefévre actually is and what he is aiming at. Of course, we can all of us fall back on Communistic shibboleths, but Furneaux believes, and I agree with him, that this particular gang is working on a definite programme. I tell you candidly, in my opinion we are up against something startling in the methods of the social revolution."

"But you yourself said you were satisfied with the progress made by the Department in one complete day, and our inquiry literally began with the stabbing of Foster last night."

"I *am* satisfied, yet I hate to see Furneaux unsettled. For instance, any other man, and he himself on any other occasion, would have crowded over the confirmation of his snake theory tonight, but he let it go by as of no importance."

"What's this about the snake? I haven't heard."

"Ah, I forgot. You put us all on a new scent when you produced Jenks, though, oddly enough, it was just the appearance of Jenks which unsettled the little man more than anything else. His disturbance at finding

that Lefévre's teachings had reached Jenks and his class was no make-believe. There are millions of Jenkses, you know. That is why Furneaux hurried off to interview the two fellows grabbed in Curzon-street. But—about the snake. Someone unknown, a man not answering in any respect to Lefévre's description, called at a naturalist's shop in the Old-Brompton-road long after closing hours last night, and bought a common green snake, a perfectly harmless creature, and took it away in a black box exactly similar to the one you saw on the table in the Dorking house. And, by the way, a call came through from Charing Cross about eight o'clock this evening for Ruffini at Mr. Thistleton's place. The policeman on duty there said that Ruffini was not in, but he would deliver any message. The inquirer, a foreigner, who spoke English well, asked if Ruffini had gone to London as arranged, and the policeman answered that he had not, but was probably engaged with the head gardener, the long drought having rendered it necessary to water the flower-beds thoroughly tonight. The voice requested him to tell Ruffini not to travel to town at all this evening, as the theatrical performance was postponed until this day week, or even later. Of course, the call came from a public telephone office.”

"So that is why Mr. Winter was so ready to wager a new hat?"

"Possibly. However, Furneaux knew all about it when he took the bet. The Chief almost keeps him in new hats. I believe he does it purposely, just to find out what really is in his mind."

"All the same, I'm convinced Furneaux won by mere chance."

"Why?"

"An explosion in a furniture repository! What an absurd setting for a tragic occurrence meant to shock England, to say nothing of worrying the police!"

"But, suppose it was intended to destroy evidence? Lefévre knows we are on his track, and, it may be, not so far off the true line as we ourselves imagine. That is a feature of this affair. Destruction, complete annihilation—these are the things aimed at, and secured, as well. There doesn't appear to be a shred of anything left in Avenue House which offers a clue. . . . Well, you cross the road here. Good night. We shall be older and wiser this time tomorrow."

Next morning Linton telephoned Curzon-street as arranged. Miss Peggy announced that she had slept "like a top," once her head reached the pillow.

"But," she went on, "I want to know at once, please,

whether you are speaking from Scotland Yard or from some place where no one has authority to cut me off without a word of explanation.”

“This time you are secured from interruption,” he laughed. “I am talking from my Club.”

“Well, wouldn’t anyone be annoyed by such treatment? This is the second time it has happened.”

“If you knew the excuse on each occasion you would pardon us, Miss Mainwaring. Last night, especially, we were throbbing with excitement.”

“Can you tell me anything?”

“Not publicly.”

“Will you lunch here, or come to tea?”

“May I ’phone you later? Surely Providence will be kind, and permit me to keep one fixture or the other.”

“I’m awfully excited. Is there any real news?”

“Lots, though not what you and I want most to hear.”

“I don’t quite get that.”

“Well, our efforts can have only one successful outcome—the capture of certain persons.”

“Oh, that would spoil everything.”

“I fear the telephone is now affecting *my* intelligence, as I don’t understand that remark.”

“Isn’t it clear that as soon as the chase ends I revert into a perfectly normal young person?”

"I see now. Unfortunately, the death roll is mounting rapidly."

Peggy was regretful, and said so.

"I know I mustn't ask any questions," she declared. "I'll curb my curiosity till you arrive. But do tell me one thing. Will there be any interesting paragraphs in the early editions of the evening newspapers?"

"Undoubtedly. There are two important items in this morning's press—the taxicab incident in Praed-street, which you witnessed, in a sense, and the blowing up of business premises in South London, which you heard. Read these in the light of your own knowledge, and you will guess a good deal."

"Don't go yet, I implore you! What became of Jenks?"

"He is well, and happy, I hope. I am now about to meet him. Not another word dare I utter, or you will be sure to use other names."

"How delightfully mysterious! I shan't stir out of the house till you 'phone, so please remember you are keeping me interned on a lovely day."

"I take it, of course, you are not going North?"

"How stupid of me! That is the first thing I meant to tell you. My people are coming to town by the night mail. I shall be in London for weeks."

Quite regretfully, Linton broke off the conversation. Not that he lacked words. The trouble was he dare not utter them. For he had taken thought during the cold light of early morning, when the events of life, even its waking dreams, lose a good deal of the glamour they borrow from evening shadows. It would have been difficult enough to disrupt all his material prospects so that he might not only marry but live happily with a girl chosen from the wage-earning class. But the social distinctions set up in Mayfair were just as potent as those that obtain in Bermondsey. The daughter of a wealthy peer, one already marked out for the high places of political preferment, was nearly as far out of reach for a young Chief Constable of Police as the said young Chief Constable for a housemaid!

“This will never do!” he told himself, lighting the first pipe of the day. “I really ought not to go to either luncheon or tea.”

He ended by going to both, an unlooked-for development which came about in the most natural way. When he reached Scotland Yard, shortly before ten o’clock, he met a rejuvenated Jenks and a spruce Blenkey. Though awed by their surroundings, the two men were conscious of being distinctly removed from the common order of mankind, inasmuch as, each in his own way,

they had an inner and peculiar knowledge of the sensational stories anent Lefévre and his gang published in the morning newspapers. The ingenuity of modern journalism had not failed to connect the series of crimes which had occurred the previous day, while disclaimers from a bank and a firm of well-known stockbrokers, stating that they had no client of the name of "Lefévre," focussed public attention on the amazing person who owned a large house and yet had contrived to destroy it so thoroughly.

Ruffini's arrest was known, too, as well as the scuffle in Curzon-street, "outside the Home Secretary's London residence." One adroit writer, remembering that a man was under remand for purveying a new and exceedingly harmful drug, went into a detailed description of certain phases of the night life of London, and stated categorically that the Continental Squad of the C.I.D. was particularly active at the moment in its surveillance of the most noted members of the underworld, both men and women.

Sir Arthur Monson and Mr. Winter were thoroughly annoyed when they read this effusion. It was altogether too clever an assumption, since none of the officials conducting the inquiry would breathe a word as to departmental methods to anyone connected with the press.

“We cannot guard against this sort of thing, Sir Arthur,” said the Chief resignedly. “These young gentlemen attend the law-courts, and remember how and when certain evidence has been obtained. Though the exact system employed to get it or the actual source whence it came may be concealed, they ferret out some of the facts subsequently, often from the prisoner when released. All these things are on record in a newspaper’s ‘library,’ where your biography and mine are already written up, ready for instant use if one or other of us retires, or meets a sudden and violent death.”

“In this case, wouldn’t it be wise to enlist the aid of the press?” mused the Commissioner aloud.

“You mean in relation to the facts still withheld?”

“Well, yes. How about a photograph of a ‘token,’ for instance?”

“Furneaux, who telephoned early to say he may not put in an appearance at any time today, is dead against any reference to the numbered half-crowns.”

“But Lefévre and his crew know that we know?”

“Yes, sir. I admit it. But, when Furneaux makes a special request—”

The Commissioner laughed.

“Oh, of course,” he said. “We just have to do as we’re told. Very well. Let us discuss this point fully

when he does turn up. Have you any notion as to what he is doing?"

"He wants to roam about in disguise. Probably, I shall pass him in the street. But *he* can get hold of *us* quickly enough, if necessary."

Linton, with his two assistants, was instructed to stroll through the main thoroughfares of the West End, and keep a sharp look-out for those members of the gang whom they knew by sight. The exigencies of the public service forbid an exact description of the way in which the patrol was conducted, or the signals they could adopt when co-operation was called for. However, no such intimate details of detective methods are essential, since that which actually happened was far removed from the rôle allotted to the trio.

At noon, when Linton was in two minds as to whether he should telephone Curzon-street at all, and, if he did, whether or not he ought to lunch there, he was standing, by arrangement, in front of a popular restaurant near Oxford Circus when a wizened old man, of poverty-stricken appearance, asked him to buy a box of matches. The request was made in the husky accents of the born Cockney, but he chanced to glance at the would-be vendor's eyes, and caught a gleam in them that was curiously reminiscent of someone he knew.

Thereupon the voice changed suddenly.

“Excellent!” it cackled. “You have all the makings of a first-rate cop! Listen, and treasure each word. Take that girl out to lunch. Then persuade her to go with you to a private show of a new picture called ‘The Volcano’ in a theatre near the Strand at half-past two. Ask for two seats at the door in the name of ‘Mr. Zedyx’—X.Y.Z. backward—and they will be given you. Look at the picture, but don’t discuss it in the theatre except with high approval. No matter whom you may see there, or what you may imagine, do nothing whatsoever till you hear from me at the main exit about four o’clock. Tell Jenks and Blenkey to meet you there, too, and close in behind Miss Mainwaring. She will be quite safe, but, if they look after her only, both you and they will know whom to hit if a row starts. If nothing happens, rush the young lady home, and be at the Yard at 5 p. m. In any case, don’t leave her for a yard or a second! Got all that?”

“Yes.”

“Then buy a box of matches, and be off.”

“As it happens, I am invited to luncheon at Curzon-street.”

“Splendid! On your way take a look at St. George’s Hanover Square! It’s an ugly but most interesting ecclesiastical edifice.”

Linton’s well-ordered brain was so intent on memo-

rising Furneaux's instructions, thus insuring their exact fulfilment, that he did not grasp the meaning of the concluding words until he was, in actual fact, gazing at the gaunt exterior of the church in which many of London's "fashionable" marriages are solemnised. Then he smiled at the conceit, though, truth to tell, he was by no means pleased at the prospect of involving the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring in any "row," howsoever harmless it might be to her personally. He believed that to the little detective the chase was the thing, no matter who suffered before the quarry was run to earth. Why bring the girl into it? Was there not proof in plenty that the wretches they were pursuing had no shred of mercy in their methods, and would sacrifice a whole theatre-full of people if by so doing they could attain their own ends?

He had been taken by surprise in Oxford Circus. Could he possibly have found Furneaux again he would have refused pointblank to include Miss Mainwaring in the afternoon's fixture. It was too late to act now. His last glimpse of Furneaux showed the match-seller hobbling with decrepit steps into a tube station. At any rate, he resolved firmly to act as he thought fit if there was the slightest sign of possible danger to his companion at the cinema performance.

In Bond-street he overtook two of the "Continental"

men at intervals of forty yards, but, as neither seemed to see him, he, also, looked elsewhere. Still, he could not help wondering why they were sauntering so aimlessly through the well-dressed throng which filled the narrow pavements at that hour: being, as it were, more than ordinarily on the *qui vive*, he noticed, turning into a manicure establishment, a woman whom he associated dimly with his recollections of the housekeeper who did the marketing for Avenue House, Dorking. Should he tell the other men of his suspicion? He halted, and glanced back, whereupon the nearest detective smiled and waved him on with a single finger.

So, then, things were moving. That was satisfactory, at least.

It was amusing to note how Mr. Hobbs eyed him, and with what instant decision the butler classified him as belonging to the right set. And the seal was placed at once on an expert's judgment when Linton entered the drawing-room, because Lord Robert Ferris came forward with extended hand, and a hearty:

“Never more surprised in my life, old bean, than when Peggy told me you were coming here today. I didn't even know you had ever met the child.”

Now, Linton, full to the chin with hopes and fears,

could not begin to guess to what extent, if any, the Guardsman shared Peggy Mainwaring's fairly ample acquaintance with the topic of the hour. To make matters more difficult, she was not present.

"My meeting with the young lady in question is quite recent in date, and altogether official," he said. "You, as an old friend of the family, have realised already what a bore it is that she should be mixed up in this present excitement."

"Well, yes. But it's something big, I'm told. Mines going up in all directions, and incendiary bombs dropping down chimneys, and that sort of thing. It became serious when my battalion was put on a service footing this morning, with one platoon in each company ready to turn out at a moment's notice."

"So the scare has reached the War Office?" said Linton, trying to find some non-committal comment.

"Yes. I had a deuce of a job to get off this afternoon, but some johnnie in Scotland Yard passed the cheery word to my O.C., and here I am."

At that moment Peggy herself hurried in, brimful of regret for being late.

"Am I dressed properly for a cinema?" she said. "I'm told that Bobby and you are taking me to see some wonderful film, but what's the use of putting on

special glad rags when the whole show is given in the dark?”

“We are rather at cross purposes, Miss Mainwaring,” said Linton. “Who told you of a visit to a cinema? I had an idea that the festivity, if it is one, was planned by one man only, and that knowledge of it would be confined to a very small circle.”

“Oh, Mr. Furneaux said nothing about that. I told him Bobby was joining us for lunch, and he said you could get three tickets as easily as two.”

“I shall not be in the least surprised if it turns out that ‘The Volcano’ is written and produced by Mr. Charles François Furneaux, of the Criminal Investigation Department. However, he has taken a load off my mind, as I have been more than doubtful whether you ought to go.”

“Dash it all!” cried Ferris, “do you think Miss Mainwaring is running any risk?”

“There is always a chance of such a thing.”

“My notion is that someone in Scotland Yard is suffering from a bad attack of nerves,” said the Guardsman.

“I have not seen any indication of it,” was Linton’s dry answer.

“Luncheon is ready. I’m sure we’re all hungry.

After a hefty meal even a volcano won't seem so terrifying."

Thus Peggy, who dreaded lest Linton might succeed in persuading the other man that she should not be permitted to accompany them to the theatre.

"Didn't you say that the detective person wanted your opinion about the propagandist effect of this film?" went on Lord Robert, when they were seated at the dining-table.

"Yes. He believed I knew so much more about Monsieur Lefévre's theories than the general public that I should be able to judge how far it might be mischievous."

"Well. That's all right. Don't you agree, Linton?"

"Yes. I suppose so. The truth is that Mr. Furneaux has enlightened Miss Mainwaring rather thoroughly. I was merely given orders, and am carrying them out."

From that instant Linton stifled his doubts. He asked no more questions. Not till long afterwards did he learn that Furneaux had pulled the different strings which brought him to the private view of "The Volcano" in company with Peggy and Lord Robert. If the Little 'Un of the Yard ever wishes to change his

profession he can always earn a competence by manipulating marionettes, because, on that summer's day in London, his tiny frame and super-active brain were controlling the movements and even the destinies of a great many human lay figures.

There was nothing out of the common in the manners or appearance of the semi-theatrical crowd which gathered for the private view of “The Volcano,” a fixture which, in the screen world, somewhat resembles a *répétition générale* on the legitimate stage, though the picture, of course, is seen exactly as it will be presented to the public at a later date.

The box-office raised no difficulty about the additional seat. Indeed, Linton noticed that the business-like young woman in charge did not so much as look at him when he mentioned “Mr. Zedyx.” They were shown to places in the front row of the gallery—the best possible position, in fact—and, after an orchestral selection of modern Russian music, the lights went out, and the title and other preliminary announcements of the forthcoming piece flickered into brilliance.

“The Volcano” was announced as “an allegory,” and the audience was not left in doubt many minutes as to the nature of the message it conveyed. Our grey old

world had been torn asunder so many times already to bring about modern conditions, and the results were so poor, it would seem, that an even greater catastrophe than any yet achieved by volcanic or seismic action (these were akin, it was held) was necessary before the Millennium could arrive.

Some quite thrilling scenes of Etna in eruption were sandwiched between large-type condemnations of society as at present constituted. By devices which Linton could not begin to explain, busy towns and smiling villages were swallowed up by subterranean fires which one had seen gathering volume and fury in the bowels of the earth. Similarly, crowds of diners in fashionable open-air restaurants, the occupants of grand stands on race-courses, people entering the Casino at Monte Carlo, and promenaders on the sea front at Deauville—all genuine pictures these, taken in vivid sunshine—were blown into nothingness by the efforts of certain “reformers” who worked secretly in underground dungeons.

Out of a bewildering chaos soon appeared a quite convincing sequence of events. Just as surely as unseen earth-forces broke a whole city into fragments, so did modern civilisation melt before the lava-stream of what was called the “new freedom” among the nations.

A royal procession “faded” into a march of the unemployed. The glitter of ill-earned wealth was replaced by the poverty from which it was wrung. Let any man be rich and honoured, he was surely doomed to destruction; let him be hungry and in rags, he was proclaimed the avenger. Certain characters, male and female, became recognisable types. The spectator followed the struggle between capital and labour, the representatives of worn-out “laws” and of new social “agreements,” with the same breathless interest a “movie” audience shows in a race between an express train and a motor-car hurrying deadly rivals to the ultimate crash. The inevitableness of the outcome was a most striking feature of the performance, which ended as it began, with Etna in convulsion, and a new Sicily of pretty houses tenanted by rather scantily-clothed human beings, rising in glory out of the ruins.

When the lights were switched on again, a gasp of relief came from the crowded house, and a buzz of excited conversation broke out. Lord Robert Ferris forgot momentarily the embargo placed on disapproving comment, and turned to Peggy with a guffaw, half of anger and half of amusement.

“What frightful tosh!” he cried.

Peggy kicked his ankle.

"Not at all," she said. "It's an awfully clever picture. I want to see it again, heaps of times. I'm sure I missed a lot of minor effects of the utmost subtlety because of the way in which the main story gripped the attention."

Linton, who had followed the whole production with rapt interest, being convinced that what he was witnessing was a most powerful exposition of Monsieur Lefévre's pet schemes—in several instances he recognised the quite definite characteristics of the explosives and fiery gases used—brought his wits back to the instant demand on them.

"You go in front," he muttered to Ferris, as they all three emerged into a crowded gangway. "Keep close to Lord Robert," he added to Peggy. "Don't get separated from him by anyone, even if you have to use your elbows. I'll assist, so don't be surprised if I propel you onward with some force."

However, no one interfered with them in any way. The entrance hall was packed, of course, as everybody knows every other body in a professional crowd, and loud-voiced opinions concerning the film were alternating with hasty arrangements for impromptu tea parties in neighbouring restaurants.

It was a relief to breathe fresh air, and see daylight once more.

“Ah!” sighed Peggy, erring in her turn, “this is good. The blessed sunshine drives that horrid volcano out of one’s mind!”

Linton saw Jenks and Blenkey near the exit, each taking his job rather seriously, and staring hard at the crowd pouring into the street. They were only looking for Miss Mainwaring and himself, but their steadfast scrutiny seemed to disconcert three men crossing the pavement to a waiting limousine. Linton, suddenly aware that he recognised the walk of two among the three, was tempted sorely to dash forward and thus disobey Furneaux’s quite explicit orders.

Fortunately, he was saved from this unpardonable offence.

The two ex-soldiers, wholly unmindful of their own definite job, exchanged glances and probably words of fiery comprehension, but were so taken by surprise that the three men were inside the car before they sprang at the door with a shout. Blenkey grabbed the handle; he reeled back with a dagger-thrust through his throat as the car leaped into movement.

“Oh, what is it?” wailed Peggy, who had not failed to notice the actions of her waiting escort.

Linton, trying to convert his two eyes into twenty, shielding her with his body, and holding himself

tense for a spring if necessary, whispered over her shoulder:

"I think Lefévre is in that car, and he may have got away, all because those chaps did not do as they were told, and no more!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE TABLEAU IN THE STREET

MEN were shouting and women screaming, because fifty people at least had witnessed the scurry, and Blenkey, after nearly collapsing, was staunching with a handkerchief the flow of blood from his wound. There had been a sufficiency of black and white gore in the theatre, but this external episode showed the genuine article rather copiously. A hubbub of loud-voiced orders and revolver shots broke out in the direction whither the car had fled, whereupon the crowd dissolved, some to see what was taking place higher up the street, most to seek safety in flight, and a few to remain where they were, because a number of women fainted outright when the shooting began.

Linton literally could not determine how to act. Every fibre in his body was drawing him to the invisible battle being waged at a little distance, but the iron bonds of discipline kept him immovable. He was not to quit Peggy's side; he was to do nothing whatsoever till he "heard from" Furneaux at the main exit. It was an odd moment for such a thought, but the fire raging in heart and brain reminded him of the pent-up

volcano of the picture. Peggy, thoroughly frightened by Blenkey's ghastly aspect, was clinging to his left arm, and brokenly asking for an explanation he could not give, while Lord Robert Ferris was torn between annoyance at the girl's obvious confidence that Linton would shield her from harm and a natural desire to find out "what all the bally row was about."

At that moment a strident American voice came from the doorway.

"Gee! So this is London! Puts me right back into Little Old Noo York!"

"Guess some crooks are shooting up the burg," agreed another voice.

"Wonder if it's an advertising stunt for 'The Volcano,'" said the first speaker.

"Nit. They won't stand for that sort of thing over here. And real lead is flying. Look at that!"

"That" was a plate glass window across the street starred by a stray bullet. Then Furneaux appeared, natty as ever, in blue serge suit, straw hat, brown shoes, with shirt, collar, tie and socks in complementary shades. First, he pounced on Jenks, who was supplying Blenkey with a second handkerchief.

"Take him to Charing Cross Hospital," he hissed, "and get the House Surgeon to conceal him with sticking plaster. Then, if the doctor decides to cut the

throats of both of you, he will rid the world of a pair of idiots. You've spoiled the neatest thing!"

He whirled round on Linton.

"Glad to see that you, at any rate, have stuck to your guns. Hop it, quick. You'll find a taxi opposite the Savoy, or nearer. Be at headquarters at five sharp."

Peggy began to recover, and, of course, to expostulate because she was hurried away. But the men were obdurate. It was impossible to determine what had taken place during the shooting affray. Thousands of people blocked the street in that direction, and were yielding slowly to the pressure of a dozen mounted police. This was the sure signal of the end of the disturbance. In a few minutes the regular flow of traffic would be resumed, and the occupants of buses and cars, now held up in long queues, would be speculating idly as to the cause of such a sudden block in the Strand at that somewhat unusual hour.

So it came to pass that Linton swallowed a cup of tea in Curzon-street, and hurried away after promising by all his gods to telephone Miss Mainwaring at the earliest possible moment.

He reached New Scotland Yard at the appointed time, and was greatly impressed by the undisturbed calm which reigned in its courtyard. There was not the

slightest sign of any activity out of the common. Indeed, in the afternoon, it is normally a quiet place, and, on this occasion its repose was only enhanced by the presence of a couple of private cars, one of which he recognised as the Chief's.

He was halted at the entrance, and his explanation that he was bidden to attend a "conference" was received with cold scepticism.

"Take a seat in the waiting-room, sir," said a stolid constable. "I'll call you when Mr. Winter gives permission."

For a few seconds Linton was angry. Then he laughed. Was it not just that quality of British phlegm which had given England her place in the world? Sheldon came to his aid, however. A number of journalists gathered in the room were panting like hounds on a leash, and Sheldon looked in to say that the Chief would see them at 5.30 p. m. exactly. He crooked a finger at Linton.

"Sorry you were held up," he said, as they passed along a corridor to the lift. "It can't be helped. Everybody who comes here tries to bluff the doorkeeper, so, if the Prime Minister himself should arrive, he would be pushed into the waiting-room."

In the Chief's office were gathered Sir Arthur Monson, Furneaux, two members of the Continental squad,

Winter himself, and a man and woman, the former handcuffed. The moment Linton entered he knew that the companion of "mon vieux" at Box Hill and the housekeeper at Avenue House were accounted for.

Mr. Winter looked up from a sheet of foolscap on which he was writing.

"Ah, Inspector Linton," he said, in an oddly matter-of-fact way, "have you seen either or both of these people before?"

In equally official tones Linton told where and when he *had* seen them.

Winter gazed sternly at the prisoners.

"Georg Moskovitch and Emilia Schwartz," he said. "You are charged, individually and collectively, with being engaged in a conspiracy against the State which has resulted in the murder of many innocent people and the destruction of property by explosives and incendiarism. There will be other charges against both of you when the evidence in our possession is considered and sifted. It is my duty now to warn you that anything you may say in answer to the present charges will be taken down in writing, and may be used in evidence against you on your trial. Do you wish to make any statement?"

"No," growled the man, evidently cowed, but still utterly malevolent.

The woman yielded suddenly to hysteria, and protested in broken English that she was only a servant. Winter touched a bell. When a constable came he told him to have the pair taken separately to Bow-street, and gave him a written memorandum of the entries for the charge-sheet.

"And now," said the Chief Commissioner, rising from his chair with a jerk when the closing of an outer door had cut off Emilia Schwartz's loud lamentations, "now I would like to hear what has really happened."

He spoke like one who was not only irritated but nervous. Winter seemed to pay no heed to the great man's displeasure. He merely nodded at Furneaux.

"The story is yours, Charles," he said. "Tell it."

Furneaux leaned forward in his chair.

"I wish you'd smoke," he cried, almost vexedly. "The atmosphere is artificial unless you are poisoning the air with one of your vile Havanas."

Sir Arthur wriggled, but controlled himself. He even took a cigar from the box proffered by Winter. Sheldon was a cigarette smoker. The others preferred their pipes. The two windows were wide open. From the Embankment came the rattle of the London County Council tram-cars and the whirr of many taxies. London was going homeward from the City. What earthly chance, thought Linton, had Lefévre and his fellow-

murderers of disturbing the poise of a people who remained so blandly indifferent alike to the wild tenets of the revolutionaries and the ghastly fate which threatened them.

"In this affair," began the diminutive speaker, "we've had so much good luck that we should not be surprised at today's hitch. Good luck! *Cré Nom!* Hundreds, it may be, thousands, might have died if Miss Mainwaring didn't spot that half-crown rolling across the road, if Mr. Linton had failed to discover the Dorking rendezvous, if he hadn't brought Jenks here last night, and, above all, if two of the unwashed had not gone to Curzon-street at eleven o'clock to see the Home Secretary's house blown sky-high. I interviewed those warriors in Vine-street about midnight, and found that one of them had been a stage carpenter in a motion-picture studio—the very place where '*The Volcano*' was made, or put together, as many of its best effects were bought from the film library of one of the great topical companies. That gave me the first definite pointer to the prospective whereabouts of the man whom we knew as Monsieur Lefévre, because the manager of the studio, a very decent fellow, who had dismissed the gentleman in Vine-street for drunkenness, assured me that the person who commissioned and paid for the picture meant to attend the private view, being greatly con-

cerned as to its effect on a professional audience. He, the said manager, was not altogether gratified by his association with the production. He regarded it as a dangerous undertaking, and fully expected its condemnation by the Censor of Films. I lay stress on this, because the more I heard of the matter about nine o'clock this morning the more convinced I was that Lefévre had a finger in the pie. I used Mr. Linton's description of '*mon vieux*,' and the studio-man recognised it at once."

He paused, perhaps purposely, and Linton ventured to break in.

"The description was really due to Miss Mainwaring's close observation," he said.

"Yes," agreed Furneaux, "that girl is certainly a marvel," whereat Linton coloured a little, and resolved to hold his tongue unless specifically appealed to.

"The Home Office analyst, however, was the man who actually revealed Monsieur Lefévre's identity, though he himself is not aware of the fact yet," went on the detective. "I saw him at 9.30, while he was breakfasting, and he told me that the analysis of the drug purveyed by 'the Doctor,' samples of which were already in our possession, had puzzled the laboratory experts. It was not a preparation of coal tar, but was rather suggestive of the synthesis of coniine, from for-

maldehyde and ammonia under the action of light, indicating the way in which these alkaloids are formed in living plants. If some unknown catalyst were discovered, the process of manufacture by artificial light and heat would be comparatively simple."

"What is a catalyst?" inquired Sir Arthur.

"I haven't the least notion, sir. I've had no time to look in the dictionary."

Linton thought he might take another chance.

"It is a chemical agent which, without undergoing any change itself, induces chemical change in other bodies," he said.

"Then there have been several catalysts used in this inquiry," said Furneaux suavely. "To continue, it was merely a good guess to connect such a process with the horticultural experiments ostensibly carried out by Monsieur Lefévre at Dorking, so I asked our expert for the names of a few men who might have investigated this abstruse branch of science. He thought there was only one great chemist likely to be interested, a French-speaking Pole named Raoul David, but he, unfortunately, had almost gone out of his mind, and could no longer be regarded as a serious analyst. In the library of the Royal Society I found a photograph of Raoul David, and it measured up exactly to the facial characteristics of Jules Lefévre."

Winter whistled, thus blowing some smoke across the table.

"Of course," purred Furneaux, "I might have seen David's portrait in many other haunts of knowledge, but, for reasons my respected Chief appreciates fully, I chose the rooms of the Royal Society. Thenceforth, it was a matter of ten minutes to ascertain that David lived near Russell Square, and I had the good fortune to see him leaving his house. By that time I was disguised, so our colleagues here"—and he glanced at the two members of the Continental branch—"took up the trail to a restaurant and the theatre. The other pair were already on the track of the woman and Moscovitch, who left the house soon after eleven, and they are now searching the place for documents, and the rest. I have little doubt we shall soon have full details of the complete organisation."

"This probably means a great many arrests," put in Winter. He glanced at Furneaux, and Linton was certain that the remark was simply a *ballon d'essai* meant for the Commissioner, who took it seriously.

"Grab the whole gang," he said with much gusto.

"The centre of interest shifted at once to the cinema theatre," went on Furneaux suavely. "Mr. Winter's arrangements were, of course, admirable. We knew our men by this time, and it was planned to arrest them

quite unexpectedly when their car was stopped, apparently by accident, some forty yards higher up the narrow street. But fate and Jenkins, in the persons of Blenkey and Jenks, intervened. Blenkey recognised David, while Jenks knew another of the trio as a Communist speaker who had foretold last night's explosions, which were probably postponed for a week or longer owing to some disruption of their projects resulting from the Dorking affair. So David and the others realised they were in a trap, and it is simply a miracle not only that Blenkey was not killed but that our own ranks did not suffer many casualties. Their car dashed through the crowd, mounted the pavement when the block in the roadway was seen, charged the men whose duty it was to stop them, and whirled round into a side street. They began shooting, too, and we have three men hit, but not dangerously. A woman was killed by being run over, and two bystanders were so injured that they are detained in the hospital. The car got away, and, of course, has not been parked in the neighbourhood of Russell-square. In fact, unless we are willing to see one of the main roads leading to the West of England strewed with the bodies of policemen, I suggest that our next meeting with Monsieur Raoul David, alias Jules Lefévre, should take place in a remote part of Exmoor."

"Exmoor!" repeated the Commissioner, in sheer astonishment.

"Yes, sir." Now it was Winter who answered. "The Home Office analyst gave thought to the recent history of Monsieur Raoul David after Mr. Furneaux left him this morning. Being a man of precise habit, he took time to check his theories, and thus, unfortunately, got me on the 'phone this afternoon at the very moment I was trying to perfect our arrangements for the arrests outside the cinema theatre. I had to decide in an instant whether or not to listen. Rightly or wrongly, I elected to hear what he had to say, because his statement struck me as opening up a clear road through the jungle of uncertainties we have been wandering in up to the present hour."

He hesitated and glanced at a clock. The time was 5.20 p. m.

"The Great Western people have promised to have a 'special' in readiness at Paddington at 7 p. m.," he explained, "and undertake to set us down at a small way-side station on Exmoor a few minutes after midnight. . . . How long will it take you to pack a bag, Mr. Linton?"

"It is packed already, sir," came the prompt answer.

"Good. We can pick it up on our way. . . . Now, I want the members of the staff to listen carefully to the

details supplied by the Home Office man. It is not necessary to take notes. All you need is a general acquaintance with the subject, which may help in individual cases as arrests continue to be made tonight in London. Monsieur David is nominally consulting chemist to a company known as 'Peat and By-products Low Temperature Distillers, Limited,' which, with a capital of £50,000, is properly registered at Somerset House. The process is in active operation on Exmoor, and it is quite probable that not a man regularly employed in an extensive plant is aware of its real nature, as large quantities of the residual charcoal are shipped from Barnstaple to the manufacturers of steel and iron in South Wales. Monsieur David, the brain behind the enterprise, goes there occasionally. We can only guess at his purpose, but analysis of the mysterious drug now being circulated so largely in this city and elsewhere makes the guess almost a scientific thesis. A dilute solution of ammonia and carbon dioxide is exposed to sunlight in a thin sheet, so as to present the greatest attainable surface. This solution holds a green dye to permit of complete absorption of the rays of light. Coniine, and many other substances, have been obtained by this means. David has discovered a catalyst which directs the chemical action from coniine to cocaine. There is reason to believe he extracts both the green

dye and the catalyst from a particular variety of seaweed found near Mounts Bay, Cornwall, and in the Scilly Isles. As a matter of fact, the Exmoor company purchases large quantities of this weed, which has the property of colouring ammoniacal solutions green, and is in stable combination with a complex organic salt containing both iodine and palladium."

Winter paused for a few seconds, not because he was at a loss for words, but to search for a memorandum. It amused Linton to note the varying expressions on the circle of intent faces. Furneaux's wizened features resembled a carved ivory mask. The others were memorising strange words. The Commissioner was frankly flabbergasted. His natural annoyance at the extraordinary escape of the master criminal that afternoon was now altogether eclipsed by the knowledge that the preparation of a potent and almost deadly drug should be possible under the very eyes of the authorities, so to speak.

"I am sorry to interrupt," he said, "but can you tell me how long the Peat, et cetera, Distillers have been at work?"

"Nearly twelve months," replied Winter, who had now found the paper he wanted. "It is estimated that the Exmoor plant is capable of producing ten tons of ammonium carbonate in crystals daily, and this corre-

sponds to the enormous output of five tons of cocaine daily, if one applies that general description to the drug of which we have obtained samples. This is the exact amount needed to effect the moral deterioration of England, allowing two grains per capitum each day for thirty-five millions of people. The drug is soluble in fats, and could be introduced into many forms of food."

"But—" began Sir Arthur.

"It is being done already, sir," said Winter firmly. "A food preservative containing it is about to be placed on the market, and the nature of the compound would not have been suspected were it not that the chemical tests of the actual drug and the preservative compound reacted to the same agents. This fact put our analysts on the track. It was a close shave—a mere matter of weeks. The series of outrages planned to begin last night was meant to distract attention from the growing effect of the poison. I have here," and a typed sheet was indicated, "a detailed statement of the probable process of manufacture, but time does not permit of discussion today. Inspector Sheldon will have other copies made, and these will be available for comparison with memoranda obtained from the Russell-square house or elsewhere."

"I think I would like to go with you tonight," said the Commissioner suddenly.

"I hope you will reconsider that, sir," said Winter, with equal promptitude. "No one in the Department can speak with your authority, and decisions of grave importance may be called for repeatedly during the next few hours. It is useless to look to the Home Office in this matter. They do not appreciate either the extent of the danger or its tremendous issues. I myself, this very afternoon, under-estimated David's resourcefulness, or he would not have slipped through our fingers. This time there must be no mistake, either here or in Devonshire."

Sir Arthur's mouth twisted in a crooked smile. He knew well why the executive head of the C.I.D. did not want him. During the next twelve hours things might be done on Exmoor of which he could not possibly approve if present, and of which he could blandly deny the least cognisance.

"Very well," he said. "You will want to send some telegrams in my name, I suppose?"

"Sheldon has the text ready, sir. If you approve, they should be despatched at once. Of course, I shall be glad to know the nature of any alterations you may deem necessary. . . . One word in conclusion, gentlemen. No one in London or elsewhere outside this room is aware of the circumstances I have set forth so hurriedly. Even my typists do not understand the purport

of the memoranda they have prepared, and your knowledge must not go beyond these four walls."

Linton found Furneaux grinning at him. It was as though the little man had said:

"This is where the Honourable Peggy Mainwaring is left out in the cold. And won't you catch it, my lad, when she hears what has happened?"

CHAPTER XIV

FROM LONDON TO EXMOOR

PEGGY herself was on the *qui vive* for a telephone call. She hugged the fond delusion that Furneaux—nice little man that he was—would arrange another dinner at the Ristorato Milano. She had the sense, or the rare self-restraint, not to attempt any communication with Scotland Yard, but she devoured the late editions of all the evening newspapers. They told her little, however. Lurid headlines reproduced almost every word of the subjoined paragraphs. “Shots outside a Strand Cinema”; “Desperadoes in a Car”; “Several people killed and wounded”—these and similar captions revealed nothing of the sequel. Indeed, Furneaux’s snarl at his two ex-soldier recruits had already laid bare to her better-informed intelligence the essential fact, namely, that Lefévre had escaped.

It may well be imagined, therefore, how she outdistanced the house staff when the telephone did ring about half-past six. A man’s voice asked deferentially for the “Honourable Miss Mainwaring.”

"Yes," she said. "Speaking."

"Were you expecting a call, miss, from anyone in particular?"

"Yes—from Captain Linton."

"That's right, miss. I was to be sure and give the message to no one but yourself. I am the hall-porter at his Club. He told me to say he will be out of town tonight, and will get in touch with you at the earliest possible moment. He wants you not to make any inquiries, but to wait until you hear from him."

"Thank you. I gather that Captain Linton must have been in a great hurry."

"Yes, miss. He just dashed in, got his bag, gave me your number, and jumped into a waiting car, which went off at once."

"When was this?"

"Not two minutes ago, miss."

"Was he alone?"

"No, miss. Two gentlemen were waiting in the car."

"Ah. You saw them, then? Were they a big man and a little one?"

The hall-porter took thought. His instructions were quite specific, and this young lady seemed to know a lot.

"I'm not so sure—" he began, but Peggy laughed.

"Oh, yes, you are!" she cried. "The big man looked like a breeder of prize cattle, and the little one had a queer, wrinkled face, somewhat on Japanese lines. The big man was, of course, smoking a fat cigar!"

She was almost certain the hall-porter scratched his head.

"Well, miss," he admitted, "I must say you've described the gentlemen to a T!"

And that was the extent of the Honourable Peggy's information during many subsequent hours, though she could not guess that it was the big man's big heart which permitted even this tiny rill of truth to reach her. Oddly enough, it was not the literal facts which she found most interesting—it was Linton's thoughtfulness in her behalf. Being an adventurous-minded young person, she would have dashed off to Paddington forthwith had she known whither the three were bound. As matters stood, she dined in solitary state, chatted agreeably with the policemen who came on guard that night, and slept the sleep of weariness and good health.

The materials for a meal were placed on the "special" at Paddington station, and Linton took his cue from his companions, who uttered not a word as to their mission. Indeed, Winter and Furneaux engaged in a

furious argument concerning the relative merits of the Yorkshire and Surrey cricket teams, the Chief holding that the premier county had phenomenal luck just when that prime factor in human affairs was most needed. Linton thought he might calm the troubled waters by introducing a kindred topic.

"When the American army came to France," he said, "I was appointed an instructor in bombing practice to a regiment from the Middle West. The officers and men were quite keen, and one of the first questions they put was whether the over-arm action of the bowler in cricket or the round-arm throw of the pitcher in baseball was found the more efficient. I was supposed to be able to decide the point, since our Canadians play the American national game."

His well-meant intervention was received in sulky silence. The old-time rivalry of Yorkshire and Surrey might not be thrust aside so easily. So he, too, said nothing more.

"Well," snapped Furneaux, when the pause became intolerable, "what's the answer?"

"I don't know," said Linton. "I got out of the difficulty by suggesting that my hearers might propound the problem in the first canteen they entered where players of both games were about equally divided, and

they would see the finest row any Provost-Marshall ever dreamed of."

Winter nipped the end off his first after-dinner cigar, and the mere action helped to restore his good humour.

"When all is said and done," he remarked judicially, "luck cannot last for ever. Monsieur Raoul David has had his full share of it. A scientific disquisition by a Home Office expert saved him today from the attendance of half a dozen police motor-cyclists, and then we had him for a certainty."

"The ball is in play," cackled Furneaux, "and it doesn't matter a pin whether you hit it with a bat or a club. Smite, Linton!"

"I admit I don't quite see why we are rushing west at sixty miles an hour," was the modest reply.

"Nor did I, till our diminutive friend persuaded me," agreed Winter, whose cigar was now drawing perfectly. "For all that, I believe he is right. Monsieur Raoul David rests under no delusions tonight. He is aware that the chase is too hot, and his main object in life at this moment is to cover up his tracks. The destruction of the furniture repository in South London may or may not have been an accident. In any event he knows that we must read into it the removal of a depot. Today's affair at the cinema has dissipated the last shred

of doubt in his mind. He is now hurrying to Devonshire by car. Indeed, Sheldon 'phoned the information a few minutes ago that he passed through Guildford at six o'clock. Unless we can circumvent him before day-break the Exmoor factory of Peat and By-Products Low Temperature Distillers, Limited, will go sky-ward in a cloud of smoke and dust. After that he means to lie low for a time, and trust to the fatuous inertia of the British Constitution and its effete police system to enable him to make a fresh start elsewhere. That is the way a criminal lunatic always reasons. Furneaux is my authority, and he knows. But for the grace of God, he would be one himself."

"Yorkshire—" began Furneaux.

"No, we are now discussing Devonshire," interrupted Winter doggedly. "Go ahead, Linton! What's troubling you?"

"Five tons of cocaine a day, sir! That strikes me as something abnormal, outrageous, almost ridiculous."

"Why? I spoke only of capacity. It has not been reached yet. The works are capable of it—that is all. They can attain it at the word of command. Meanwhile, the greater part of the output is commercially sound. Let me explain. The Exmoor plant is a known thing, and we possess full details. Bonecourt surface

combination gas-fired steam boilers cannot be erected without someone being aware of the fact, even though they require neither elaborate foundations nor smoke-stacks. Condensed water from steam is used for bringing the ammonium carbonate into solution. This is done in large concrete tanks, and the mysterious catalyst-dye is added. A total area of 10,000 square feet is provided, as well as a Kestner Vacuum Evaporator for dealing with about two hundred tons of liquor daily. A number of sheds cover operations for filtering, crystallisation, and the rest. Only a small quantity of the catalyst-dye is needed, and David prepares that in a laboratory open to himself alone. That is where the by-products of peat notion come in useful. Who is to define the limits of by-products nowadays? The scheme is almost perfect. Almost—not quite. He had to depend on human agency, and that is where he fell down. We wouldn't have heard a thing about it if Miss Mainwaring hadn't discovered that marked half-crown and met you."

"Yet in a few hours you have secured all this knowledge of an abstruse scientific theory?" cried Linton.

"Ah, my boy," laughed the Chief, "you have little experience of analytical chemists. Give them the smallest bone of fact, and they'll build you a fully-

equipped factory over it. That easy-going fellow in the Home Office is prepared now to discuss the whole process with David himself. Listen to this," and Winter took from a pocket the typed document he produced but did not read during the latest conference at Scotland Yard. "Here is the complete system set forth in chapter and verse:

1. Obtain condensed water from the evaporator.
2. Dissolve in a tank with a six hours' capacity, the necessary amount of Ammonium Carbonate Crystals with the condensed water. Stir in the unknown Catalyst-Dye material.
3. Pump the coloured liquor into an elevated feed tank.
4. Allow the liquor to run continuously but very slowly down inclined slabs exposed to sunlight, and collect in a storage tank. The absorbed light from the sunlight produces some Formaldehyde. The mysterious Catalyst turns the solution of the salts to the Cocaine instead of the Coniine Salt.
5. Pump the liquor into a series of steam-heated evaporators of the Kestner vacuum type.
6. Run the concentrated liquor into a suitable mixing tank. Add dilute acid, mix, and run off into 'salting out' tanks.
7. Filter the precipitated salts in a washing filter-press.
8. Decompose the resultant salts in a tank with Ammonia Solution, and obtain the crude Cocaine.

9. Recrystallise the crude Cocaine from the water by dissolving in a steam-heated tank.
10. Run into a cooling tank.
11. Filter out the re-crystallised Cocaine.

"There you have it. I don't pretend to understand why, but our Home Office analyst regards the whole thing as akin to making butter out of cream."

"Is a large staff employed?"

"About sixty men in the actual works, not counting carters and labourers. It is evident that the local inland Revenue authorities know nothing of the cocaine product. They are interested mainly in the financial results, and were persuaded last year that the distillation plant had nothing to do with dutiable alcohol. The food preservative part of the scheme guarded the secret admirably."

"Has this been placed on the market?"

"No. The preliminary advertising matter is ready, and has a most plausible sound. David claims that the stuff prevents fermentation, which is the basic principle of decomposition. Before many months we might all be swallowing his drug in milk, butter, cheese, fish, bacon, jam—nearly everything, in fact, capable of absorbing it."

"Like arsenic in beer," put in Furneaux.

Taunton was the first stop. Here the "special" changed engines, and a local police officer brought to the saloon a long telephone message from Devon, where preparations were in hand to meet the very urgent request for help telegraphed by Sir Arthur Monson. It was then 9.45 p. m., and the party was *en route* again before ten o'clock.

Sheldon also had telephoned to say that David's chauffeur had taken the opportunity to slip away when the car stopped for petrol at a West London garage. The man had surrendered himself voluntarily, but professed that he knew little or nothing of his employer's business.

This was the first point discussed as the train sped West again.

"Mr. Sheldon evidently did not ascertain who took the wheel subsequently," commented Linton.

"You may be sure the chauffeur vanished into back streets as quickly as his leggings would allow him to move," said Furneaux. "Of course, he might have died unexpectedly somewhere on Exmoor about dawn tomorrow, but I wish he had stuck to his job. David will now have the wind up properly."

"These fellows should be treated like so many mad dogs," said Winter sternly. "Their car should be halted with a jerk, and a volley poured into them before they

can lift a weapon. Yet, what can we do? What a howl will go up in Parliament if we arrange a Sinn Fein ambush!"

"See that your first wires are high enough, and there should be little difficulty," suggested Linton.

"How do you mean?"

"Smash the wind-screen before the wheels meet any resistance. We shall be ready—they cannot possibly be. Let a man on each side of the road thrust a heavy carriage rug or piece of tarpaulin through the windows. In such conditions any shooting they may attempt will fly wild, to say the least."

"That is what I may describe as the soldierly method," smiled Winter, "but I am anxious to catch this chap alive, so—"

"You're wrong," vowed Furneaux emphatically. "How do you know for certain that we can hang him? I, for one, will not sleep soundly until David is dead. He is an evil influence—a deadly germ which cannot be confined by the walls of any jail, be they of triple brass and many cubits high. I suppose I cannot bring myself to shoot him in cold blood, but he won't have to crook his elbow before I let him have one in the right place."

"You bloodthirsty little ruffian!" muttered the Chief. He turned to Linton. "It'll be a nice kettle of fish,

won't it, if we have to bring Furneaux back to town heavily manacled?"

"Better that than for us to bring you back in a coffin, you big stiff," growled Furneaux, who seemed strangely ill at ease.

Winter did not reply. He took out a notebook, and, after consulting a railway guide, jotted down some figures. Then Furneaux grimaced with just a spice of his wonted sardonic humour.

"Barring road accidents, David will reach the gates of his factory at 5 a. m.," he announced. "He cannot possibly be there before four. That gives him eleven clear hours, but the Exmoor roads will cost him another hour."

"You are very confident that he really is making his way here," Linton could not help saying.

"Where else is he to go? The Exmoor plant is the nerve centre of his project. All he wants now is to destroy it. From his point of view, even after the defection of the chauffeur, who didn't know where the car was going, or Sheldon would have told us, the circumstances favour him. Put yourself in his place. He left London in an uproar. The police are supposed to be rushing about from Russell-square to various addresses and night clubs where they might stumble across him or some of his dupes. He assumes by this

time that we know nothing of Peat and its By-Products, or an attempt would be made to arrest him on the road, and woe betide any unfortunate bobbies who tried to stop his car at a town *en route*. No, sir. Every mile restores his confidence. He is almost sure now that he can reach the factory unhindered, and will even have a few hours to spare for the complete destruction of the works and his own escape. Unless the sun doesn't rise again—in which case none of us will have any further interest in life—Monsieur David will meet us on Exmoor about five o'clock tomorrow morning."

The train drew up quietly at a wayside station in a North Devon valley, deposited its passengers on the platform, and departed forthwith for Barnstaple. A number of men were in waiting. Their leader, a county superintendent of police, made himself known.

"Twenty picked constables, all well armed, with six motor-bicyclists among them, will rendezvous at two o'clock within a mile of the Peat factory," he explained. "Work begins there at seven, and the employés have breakfast in a mess-room at half past eight. I think I ought to warn you that Mr. Thomas is highly popular. He is generous and—"

"Mr. Thomas?" interrupted Winter.

"Yes, the consulting chemist who comes here occasionally from London."

"Do you know him personally?"

"No. But the local constable is well acquainted with him."

"Is that man here?"

"Yes."

"Will you bring him forward?"

It was quite dark in the shadow of the station buildings, but in response to a name a figure detached itself from the dimly seen group.

"Can you describe Mr. Thomas?" said Winter at once.

The man was taken somewhat aback, since a verbal picture of any person, if accurate and recognisable, demands long training coupled with close observation.

"Well, sir," he began, "he's a pleasant-spoken gentleman of about fifty, five feet nine inches in height, of slight but active build, pale complexion, with brown eyes, and a short beard."

"Capital! Has he a domed forehead, a hooked nose, a receding chin, with a bird-like cast of feature, and does he speak with a thin, reedy voice?"

"That's him exactly, sir."

Winter sighed his relief. He would have disliked

intensely any further complications in regard to the identity of Monsieur Raoul David.

“By the way, this constable obtained an item of news which may be of value,” said the local superintendent. “Mr. Thomas has instructed a man in the neighbouring village, whom he employs as a messenger when visiting the factory, to await him in the village street tomorrow morning at a quarter to five.”

“How did you hear this?” said Winter, turning to the policeman again, and ignoring a slight cough from Furneaux.

“Hicks told me himself, sir,” was the answer. “He got a telegram from London, which he showed me.”

“Does Hicks know why he is wanted?”

“He has no notion, sir.”

“Where is Hicks now?” inquired Furneaux.

“In bed, sir.”

“Are you sure?”

“I passed his house after supper, and he was in his bedroom. I heard him winding an alarm clock.”

“Is he likely to have noticed the presence of extra police in the place, or strange cars, or would he be told of the coming of a special train from London?”

"He couldn't be aware of any of those things, sir, because I didn't know them myself then."

As a matter of fact Furneaux had reached instantly a correct conclusion as to Hicks and the telegram. David did actually seek information from the man on practically the identical points raised by the detective.

"How far distant is the factory?" went on Winter.

"About two miles, uphill, and a bad road. It will take us fifteen minutes, as we must drive carefully," said the Superintendent.

"Have you cars enough to seat all of us?"

"Oh, yes. I left them on a common outside the village, which we can reach by a footpath, thus avoiding the houses."

"That is first-rate. I would like now to meet the squad you spoke of. In this affair every man must understand exactly how important his duties are. Any failure may cause a national disaster."

The Superintendent whistled softly.

"Is Mr. Thomas connected with the outrages reported in the newspapers today?" he asked.

"Yes. He is the most dangerous criminal now alive."

"Well," said the other, "I've done a bit of guessing since the Chief Constable sent for me this evening, but I couldn't credit my own thoughts. Dash it all! Three

weeks ago this very man gave a £5 prize for the finest baby born in the village during 1921!"

Soon after two o'clock Winter addressed a gathering of some twenty-five officers and men of the Devon County Constabulary, and told them a story which none of them will forget till memory itself is dead. An element of weird tragedy lent itself to the strange things he said because of the dramatic surroundings. The contingent was drawn up in a narrow valley choked with trees, and, as no lights were shown, it was impossible to discern the form or features of any individual. There was a voice addressing a collective ear, and that was all. The Chief spoke slowly, and every word told. No muttered instructions in a front line trench for a midnight raid on the enemy had ever sounded half so thrilling, Linton thought. There, at any rate, soldiers were about to attack an alert and well-armed foe, but the forces at war with law and order in that remote part of rural England were vague, sinister, almost diabolical in their design to crush out of existence all that mankind had achieved for the benefit of the race during countless centuries of gradually successful effort. The darkness seemed to be full of impalpable beings, evil, menacing, ready to leap unseen barriers in order to wreak some sort of elfin vengeance on helpless humanity.

Even the stolid and solid country policemen were not immune from some such fanciful notions.

Although conversation was forbidden when the little column moved in file along a moor road, Linton heard one man whisper to another:

"By gum, I'm glad we're out of that wood! While that chap from London was talkin' I expected every minnit that some rotten thing like a seven-foot ape would spring at me from behind."

"Something ran up my leg. I think it was a field mouse," said his companion. "I tell you I nearly roared 'Murder!'"

A brisk tramp up-hill dispelled these vapours. Winter, after consulting with his colleagues and the Superintendent, decided to occupy the works and endeavour to arrange matters so that the car would pass through the main gateway, and its occupants be permitted to alight before they had the least ground for suspicion that life on Exmoor that morning was not running in its normal grooves. The residential part of the premises was occupied by a manager, four engineers, and two night-watchmen. Among other duties, the latter looked after the furnaces. There was no telephone, but so much business was transacted by telegraph that the Post Office had installed an additional wire on the local

line, and had stationed an experienced operator in the village.

Quite recently, the resident staff had erected a wireless outfit, with which they could pick up messages from neighbouring broadcasting centres, but Winter discounted this appliance as being of no value, because Sheldon would so arrange matters with the authorities that no extraneous communication could get through.

It was evident, however, from the surprise and excitement caused by the arrival at the gates before dawn of a strong body of police, that the resident manager had received no prior warning of the possibility of any unusual occurrence. At first, he was inclined to be sceptical and uncommunicative, but came to his senses speedily when he learnt the identity of the men in charge of the raid.

He showed a telegram which announced that Mr. Thomas would be at the works about five o'clock, and agreed that he and others connected with the company were aware that the name was a *nom de guerre* adopted by the famous Polish-French chemist, Monsieur Raoul David.

"Why should he find it necessary to use an alias?" inquired Winter.

The manager, a sharp-eyed little Welshman, laughed at this.

"The theory is that Monsieur David is a trifle cracked, sir," he said, "and that would not be the best of recommendations for our chemical products, which are really the most wonderful things in their way yet known to science."

"Are the other members of your staff British—I mean the six men now in the building?"

"Yes, sir."

"Genuine engineers and working-men?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Kindly summon them to your office. I have little time to spare, so I purpose explaining things to you collectively."

Furneaux took advantage of the interval to whisper in Winter's ear. Whatever the suggestion was, the Chief first disapproved, but was ultimately convinced. Linton, saying nothing, but keeping eyes and ears open, saw that Furneaux drew aside two of the police cyclists, and spoke to them earnestly for many minutes. At half-past three, the trio went out, and were not seen again until much later. At that time dawn was breaking over the heather-clad hills, whose summits were still silhouetted in black against the tender tints of pink and blue and green in the north-east sky. The

air was keen and invigorating. Another glorious day of an English summer noteworthy, as a whole, for its unbroken weather, was heralded by the appearance of a few wisps of cloud overhead and the dense mists rising from the valleys.

All nature was asleep. Hardly a bird was stirring yet. Exmoor wore a mantle of utmost peace, and seemed to smile in placid dreams of bye-gone ages.

CHAPTER XV

THE SETTLEMENT

IN all civilised countries it is not the office of the police to execute the dread penalties of the law. Their duty is to arrest criminals, bring them to trial, and, if necessary, where outraged public opinion seeks to inflict summary justice, protect them at the risk of their own lives. In the present instance, greatly as the Chief of the C. I. D. would have preferred to safeguard himself and his men by shooting at sight a murder-gang which would stop at nothing either to avoid capture or take vengeance on the representatives of the law, he was obliged to devise measures which would render possible, at least, the capture of its members not only alive but unharmed.

It would serve no good purpose now, however, to describe the plan he adopted. It was defeated ere ever it saw the light, and to this day neither he nor any of his colleagues knows exactly how, or why. They can hazard shrewd guesses, of course. David, undoubtedly a lunatic, had many sides to his strange nature. The man who could use a snake to terrorise a half-conscious maid-servant, and yet take an active

interest in the wellbeing of some lusty infants in a Devonshire village—who could apply science both for the benefit of his fellow-men and for their wholesale destruction—was obviously endowed with conflicting qualities of head and brain which influenced those brought in contact with him in exact proportion with the elements of good or evil they found in him. Thus, the police, who had taken the full measure of his fiendish intent, knew him to be a homicidal maniac, whereas there could be no question that some among his associates believed he was the prophet of a new evangel, while the men who carried out his technical instructions in the Exmoor factory regarded him as a genius—even if an eccentric one—and philanthropic to the core.

Possibly, therefore, Mr. Winter's earnest words fell on more than one pair of deaf ears when he harangued the seven employés of the Peat and By-Products Company as to David's real aims and objects. It often happens that a supposed benefactor cannot be dethroned thus readily. A phase of human nature which Winter momentarily lost sight of, too, is that curious element of sympathy with the under-dog in a struggle between law and criminality which is a recognised feature of the average mind all the world over, and this strange growth may have borne fruit at a crucial

moment. Be that as it may—whether some person signalled a secret warning, or David was given a premonition of danger by some occult sense—the fact remains that when his car mounted the hill in broad daylight about five o'clock, he did an unprecedented thing.

It was not unusual that he should motor from London by night, it seemed. He suffered from sleeplessness, and made no secret of his liking for long journeys over darkened roads, when, he said, his brain became extraordinarily active. It was his habit—as a species of intellectual pastime—to think out problems backwards—starting, that is, from perfection, reviewing intermediary processes, and making notes of the greater difficulties met in the descent for careful laboratory experiments later.

The factory gates would not be opened until seven o'clock. As he often arrived there much earlier, he would sound the motor-horn until one or other of the night watchmen appeared, and the car could enter the spacious yard.

On this occasion he acted quite differently. The car was halted fully fifty yards from the entrance. Then it was turned swiftly, and an attendant was summoned by repeated blasts on the horn. There was nothing for it, therefore, but for a man to go out, and ascertain

why "Mr. Thomas" did not follow his customary routine.

David himself was at the wheel.

"Is Mr. Evans up?" he asked sharply, when the watchman hurried forward.

"Yes, sir," was the answer. It could hardly occur to the man that such a reply must add fuel to the fire of doubt now blazing in a mind quick to detect the least departure from the normal run of things at the works.

"Why? Has he been disturbed by earlier visitors?" came the unexpected demand.

"I believe he had a telegram to say you were coming, sir—" which, in the conditions, was a quick-witted explanation enough.

"Tell him I want to speak with him here," said David. "And close those gates when he comes out."

Evans, by this time, being himself a chemist of no mean attainment, was convinced that Winter's astounding statements were true. A hundred minor circumstances leaped to the eye in corroboration, since that which is not even vaguely understandable by ignorance stares at one in the biggest and most legible of type when read by the light of knowledge. When this message reached him, therefore, he rested under no de-

lusions either as to the nature of his employer's present errand or the real peril of his own position.

"I think you may lose your bird—for this morning, at any rate—if I go outside, and the gates are shut," he said hurriedly to Winter. "David is obviously alarmed. At the least sign of interference he will be off. With the almost certain prospect of being shot if I try and mislead him, I admit candidly that I shall most probably blurt out just what he wants to know."

There was so much truth in this contention that the Chief had to deal with the problem at once from a new aspect. His men, of course, were ready, and all had bicycles of one type or the other. As soon, therefore, as the manager emerged from the door of the office, apparently in obedience to his employer's request, and was ostensibly making for the gateway, the four motorcyclists dashed out, Winter's hope being that the mere fact of Evans crossing the courtyard would lull suspicion for just the few seconds needed to bring this front line of the attack so close that both rear tyres of the car could be put out of action. Then the men were to diverge to left and right into the heather, which was short, and worn away by many small paths on both sides of the road. The remainder of the cycle squad was to scatter similarly, at least half-a-dozen trying

to pass the car, and meet it with direct volleys if it did not halt at command. He himself assumed the most dangerous post of all. He would challenge David and his companions, and call on them to submit quietly to arrest, though convinced in his own mind that they would do nothing of the sort. Still, *noblesse oblige*, even in the C. I. D. The effort had to be made.

At the last moment, so to speak, Linton murmured so that the Chief alone could hear:—

“Don’t run straight toward the car! Move diagonally!”

Winter realised the value of this advice, which reduced considerably the chance of being hit by antagonists whose nerves would be jarred already by sight of so many armed policemen. Here, again, however, David’s promptitude discounted all preconcerted schemes. The instant the four motorists appeared fire was opened from two automatic pistols through the back window of the car, which had been detached for this very purpose. The shooters had the range, too, and a fairly compact target. One policeman fell, bringing down a comrade as his machine swerved. The others pressed on gallantly, and began shooting, but the car was in motion now, and nothing but sheer luck could make effective any bullet sent in pursuit, since

the men had to guide their machines with one hand over a road hardly fit to ride at the best of times, while endeavouring to use a pistol with the other.

David, too, was familiar with and could see clearly the worst ruts and turns, whereas these were practically unknown to the assailants, who soon suffered more casualties. for the most part, luckily, from collision. Thus, amidst a fury of pistol-shots, machine-gun-like exhausts from engines, and the unmeaning yells by which men try to relieve the strain of intense excitement, the fight passed in a wild scurry over the small plateau which held the factory, and swept confusedly down the hillside to the valley beneath.

This first burst of the tornado began and ended in a few seconds. Winter, Linton, the local superintendent and the works manager were the only persons on foot. One of the motor-cyclists had been shot through the shoulder, and the man who was thrown by the skidding of his machine had broken his left fore-arm.

Linton saw that one of the cycles was little if any the worse for the mishap, and made up his mind to join in the chase.

"Is there no short cut to the village?" he said, and his calm, unemotional tone acted as a tonic on the excitable Welshman.

"Yes," was the answer. "It bears off to the right by that clump of rock there, but it is very steep, and only small boys and born idiots ever tackle it on a bicycle."

Linton was off on the instant. The flying battle was now two hundred yards away. Though he did not know it yet, the path he followed cut off quite four hundred yards of the mile and a quarter which the moorland cart-way followed before it joined a properly macadamised road. His project was simplicity itself. If he could head the car he would throw the heavy motor-cycle across the track, seek such cover as offered, and fire aimed shots at the fugitives when their flight was stopped or greatly hindered by the obstacle in their way. He soon learned, however, that one man had already foreseen not only David's bold attempt to escape but the only possible manner of it, and had devised an effective and altogether deadly counter-stroke.

At a point where the road curved around an almost precipitous hill, with a bold escarpment of rock on one side and nothing stouter than a post and rails warding passing traffic from a steep slope on the other, Furneaux had stationed his cyclist policemen, with orders to fire without warning at the occupants of the car if it came

back that way. Their machines rested securely behind the large boulder which sheltered them, while he took up a similar position some forty yards lower, and at the extreme outermost point of the curve.

Linton, racing at breakneck speed across the chord of the arc, reached a point where further progress on an uncontrollable machine meant suicide. He stopped perforce, and was scanning the lie of the land to determine whether or not a valiant plunge through the heather might not offer a possible chance of success at a greater distance when he caught sight of the ambush which had forestalled him. Realising that his own attempt was doomed to fail—since no conveyance other than a mule or a hunter trained to negotiate similar country could have brought him in safety to a point where he might intervene effectually—he watched the exciting spectacle staged fully two hundred feet beneath. Indeed, feeling that he might help by distracting David's attention, he showed himself on the sky-line, and began shooting at the oncoming car.

Seldom, even in his all-round experience of exciting episodes in the war-zone on the Western Front, had he been privileged to watch all phases of such a sharp and thrilling fight as that which now enlivened this slope of placid Exmoor. The prone figures of Furneaux

and the two policemen, the racing automobile, the pursuing mob of two motor-cycles and some dozen cyclist police, the rapid narrowing of the terrain occupied by the small waylaying force and the fast-moving battle—these things were of the very essence of dramatic action. Whether or not his own shots turned the scale in the least degree he could never determine subsequently. But what did happen was this:—when his third or fourth bullet, carefully aimed, went whining at the car, Furneaux's assistants joined in. At the range, and in the circumstances, these latter could hardly miss their target. The stout glass of the wind-screen was shattered into fragments, and almost simultaneously the car smashed into the face of the rock on which the policemen were stretched. Thence it rebounded into the fence on the opposite side of the road, and plunged headlong down the cliff, turning over twice ere it struck a tree some sixty feet below. Then there was an explosion of the sort which the ears of three men present on that bleak moorland recognised—a rending, blinding crash which tore a powerful structure of steel into fragments and rendered impossible even the identification of the three human beings thus effectually blotted out of existence:

Leaving his cycle where it stood, Linton raced down a steep path to join Furneaux, whom he found remov-

ing some large stones arranged on the near side of the road in such wise that the off fore-wheel of the car must strike them had it reached that point.

"I left nothing to chance," said the little man coolly. "Those blighters might have dodged the bullets; they simply could not have cleared *that* little obstacle. Still, I'm glad they went over a few yards away. It was a more sporting finish. But, *nom d'un nom*, where did *you* come from?"

Linton explained, and Furneaux laughed cheerfully.

"You sent a cold chill down my spine," he cackled. "I heard your automatic, and thought David had stolen a march on us by planting reinforcements on the hill-side. . . . Ah! Here is Winter, running magnificently! Bet you a new hat he won't be able to light a cigar for five minutes by the clock!"

Linton, watching the most notable sprint which the Chief had indulged in during many years, did not take the bet, which he would have lost, because Winter had neither time nor breath to even think of his cherished Havanas during the next half hour. Indeed, he had much to occupy his mind. When certain notebooks, purses, watches, and other trinkets were picked up, the local police were left to collect such fragments of bodies and clothing as remained. The detectives were now

anxious to examine the factory, especially David's private laboratory, which they would then seal and hand over to the safe custody of the Devon officials until the Home Office experts could go through its contents at leisure.

But, meanwhile, Mr. Evans had been thinking hard, and it must be remembered that he, too, by reason of his profession, had the trained mind of the scientist. He vetoed absolutely the notion of forcing the door of the laboratory, or even trying to open it with one of a bunch of keys which had been found near the scene of the explosion.

"Thomas, or David, as I ought to describe him now, used to enter that room in a peculiar way," he said. "He would never allow me to accompany him when he went there, but one day, by chance, unknown to him, I happened to go up the stairs leading to the corridor in which it is situated, and saw him fumbling with his left hand, apparently against the interior wall, when the door was open only a few inches. I am acquainted with no explosive quite so powerful as that which has destroyed this car and its occupants, and it occurs to me that he provided effectually against any prying into his secrets during his absence. The place has three large windows, which can be reached by a ladder. I take it you gentlemen will not deny me the right to

find a way in, and incur such risk as may be necessary. In a sense, I was the man's accomplice. It is only fair I should prove that my co-operation with him was an innocent one."

It was evident that the Welsh manager felt his position keenly, so Winter approved of his plan, and went so far as to order all others to clear out of the building to a safe distance when the ladder was adjusted in accordance with Evans's directions.

They watched him mount it, and peer in through a window. Then he came down to secure a chisel and saw. After removing two fairly large panes of glass he cut away the centre beading, but did not attempt to raise the sash. Climbing inside, he disappeared, and some minutes elapsed before he showed up again.

"You can come by the stairs now," he said. "The door is open. One of those keys fitted the lock."

Four men trooped up, and three among them understood at a glance the nature of the thin wires which Evans had disconnected from the door and from each of the window-sashes.

"I don't know where they lead yet," he said, in an awed whisper, "but, if you gentlemen are not up to these dodges, I recommend you strongly not to make any further search, but to leave this place

to those whose business it is to inquire into such matters."

They took his advice. A week later a man from the Home Office reported that the wires connected with detonating devices similar to that which Furneaux found in the machinery of the Ford car at Avenue House, Dorking. Any of these would have fired a very large quantity of David's explosive, packed in a locked cellar in the basement. Thus, even at the twelfth hour, he was cheated of the vengeance he meant wreaking on his captors.

Given such extraordinary conditions, Winter thought he was justified in taking the "special" back to London, where he and his two companions arrived about three o'clock in the afternoon. Sir Arthur Monson was in such a hurry to rush to the Chief Superintendent's room when told of his presence that he upset the contents of a large and well-filled inkstand over an otherwise spotless table.

The Yard's first and most urgent task now was to deal with the press, and the Commissioner himself undertook it. Confidential representations to editors and the heads of the chief news agencies secured the desired end. David and his conspiracy against the general weal were whittled down into a mere struggle between the police and motor banditti. A sensational

scandal in the highest boxing circles snuffed it out of existence in a couple of days.

* * * * *

The Honourable Peggy Mainwaring seemed to be subdued in tone when her latest admirer told her over the 'phone how David and his principal henchmen had fared. She was somewhat tongue-tied and distract, and Linton jumped to the conclusion that the stress of recent events had proved too much for her. Of course, if he lives another fifty years he may come to understand that when a man believes he has sensed the cause of any tumult raging in a woman's heart he is invariably wrong.

Next morning he reported at the Yard with a view toward returning to his ordinary duties. Furneaux received him at once, the Chief being absent.

"Well," said the little man cheerily, "what d'ye think of us now? An effete and pampered lot, aren't we?"

"You know best," countered Linton. "That is not the view I have formed during my few hours of service with your crowd. How are all our fellows who were wounded?"

"Doing well. There are no half measures about the average cop. He has either to be killed outright or he

refuses even to remain in bed. You see, he is extraordinarily fit. Plenty of healthy exercise, and no brain work. Look at Winter!"

"Made many arrests in London?"

"Over twenty. We are now playing the great game of finding the missing numbers. It's just like a jigsaw puzzle. But it is odd what poor human material Monsieur David used. Just shows what one genius of warped intelligence, plus plenty of money, can achieve. Remove both and the whole show collapses. That woman, Emilia Schwartz, threw up her hands when the female searcher at Bow-street found a crescent-shaped mole on her shoulder. She has told us all she knows, her sole anxiety being that she shall not be sent to France. Where do you think she and the others made for when they blew up Avenue House?"

"I haven't the least notion."

"Walked across the hill to a cottage at Reigate. They followed field-paths the whole way, and only crossed one road."

"Then, if I had gone after them that night—"

"You would now be dead as a red herring. Mac-Dermott is a wise old bird, and knew what he was doing in preventing you from being butchered quite uselessly. Three times on the way they waited behind

trees in case they were being pursued, and that younger fellow, Schwartz, who seldom left David, was a noted shot with an automatic. Another marksman was named Bauer. Probably it was he who winged the first of the stout-hearted Devons."

"I must apologise to my esteemed Superintendent. I was very angry with him at the moment. Have you found out why those rascals blew up the furniture repository?"

"The woman says, and I see no reason for disbelieving her, that the place was their principal storehouse for the drug which David discovered and was supplying freely to all applicants. It was a highly concentrated product—one grain as potent as ten of morphia—and the trunks which held their stock, as a sort of reserve in case the Devon manufactory had to be closed, were protected by locks which, if tampered with, operated a bomb. The feasible explanation is that one or both of the caretakers was gratifying a natural curiosity as to why these particular trunks were visited periodically."

"How is Blenkey?"

"He was not detained. Merely a flesh wound."

"Shall I be wanted to give evidence against Schwartz?"

"No. He goes to Paris. We want no Communistic row here."

"Then please convey my kind regards to Mr. Winter and Mr. Sheldon. I'm off to Dorking."

"What's the hurry?"

"You don't need my services further, I take it."

"Going to say 'Good-bye' to Miss Peggy?"

"No. I really don't wish to see her again."

"Don't be a perfect idiot. Her father is Home Secretary, and he owes you some help when you apply for that Chief Constableship. At any rate, ring up now, and bid his daughter a graceful farewell."

Linton thought it would be churlish to refuse, and Furneaux indulged in weird grimaces when he heard the younger man being pressed to come and lunch at Curzon-street, on the ground that Lord and Lady Copmanthorpe were anxious to meet him and learn the story of the past few days from the lips of one who took such a prominent part in all these astounding incidents. Of course, it was practically impossible to refuse such an invitation, so he expressed himself as delighted.

"You look it," chirped Furneaux, when the receiver was hung up. "What's the matter? Don't you like her any longer?"

"She is the most charming girl I have ever met."

"'Nuff said. Sail right in, and cut out Bobby Ferris."

Linton rose with a laugh.

"You forget I am only an ordinary bobby," he said.
"Now, if I were a real, live detective—"

He enjoyed the luncheon, however. After father and mother had been properly horrified at their daughter's folly in taking a day's bicycling holiday alone they were pleased to listen with tense interest to Linton's recital of his adventures. In fact, Lord Copmanthorpe said such nice things about his services to the nation that it really seemed as though he might look forward to a post a good deal higher than any that could be offered by a county.

Nevertheless, back he went to Dorking, to pass a few instructive days with the Home Office expert who searched the ruins of Avenue House for further traces of David's system of manufacturing cocaine, since investigation in Devonshire showed that some part of the process was carried on elsewhere.

Fred Blenkey, solaced with a handsome donation as recompense for his wound, decided that Monica Jackson's health could be most speedily restored if she married him when convalescent. The lady was willing,

and she herself received a cheque from the Home Office. Furneaux's analysis of her ordeal on that fateful night was correct in every detail. She will dread snakes all her life, however. She cannot bear even to look at eels in a fishmonger's shop. Jenks became a recruit for the Metropolitan Police. He knows now that orders must be obeyed literally.

Linton was made an Acting-Superintendent in July, and granted a fortnight's special leave. On his first day in London he met Lord Robert Ferris, who was quite cordial, took him to Hurlingham, and introduced him to Lady Ursula Waneham, a sprightly young person whom the Guardsman admired immensely, and by no means secretly.

"But," said Linton, whose heart was beating a trifle faster than usual, "I had a sort of impression that you and the Honourable Peggy—"

"Well, yes," said the other, with a sheepish smile. "I was badly smitten there, I admit, but she chucked me so emphatically that day after the cinema show that I couldn't but take 'No' for an answer."

"Do you mean to say you proposed then?"

"No better time, I thought. Tears and timidity, and that sort of thing, you know. By Jove, wasn't I the mistaken lad? Told me she would rather grow apples

in Vancouver than settle down to the vapid life of London. What the blazes put Vancouver apples into her head I can't imagine. And why is life here vapid? She must have meant 'rapid.' Eh, what?"

Cabinet changes were imminent, and the Home Secretaryship was going back to the House of Commons, so Lord Copmanthorpe and his family were detained in town. When Linton called at Curzon-street one member of the household greeted him rather frigidly. But he took heart of grace, and persevered; hence, early in 1923, two leading lights of the Criminal Investigation Department were bidden attend a certain "smart" wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, followed by a reception at the Curzon-street residence of the bride's parents.

"So, that's that," commented Mr. Winter, blowing a cloud of smoke at the invitation card. "The handsome young sergeant marries the superior housemaid, after all. Frog, my boy, you'll be getting off yourself one of these days."

Furneaux tried to look downcast.

"No respectable girl of my acquaintance would marry me while I belong to the C.I.D.," he said bitterly. "It's a frightful occupation. And, look at the pay! I'd earn some real money running about with dishes in Pucci's café."

"Ah, that reminds me!" said the Chief. "We're dining there with Linton and MacDermott on Thursday. See that no sordid crime interferes with that date. Pucci has orders to stage something extra special. It's practically our budding Assistant Commissioner's last bachelor dinner."

THE END

